Dear Churchwardens

Welcome to this year’s Archdeacon’s Visitation News! We hope that you will enjoy reading the articles it contains and we extend our thanks to Ecclesiastical, who sponsor this publication as one of the many ways in which they support the life of the churches in this diocese.

The last fifteen months have been like none we have previously experienced. The challenges brought upon us by the outbreak of COVID-19 and the on-going battle to bring the pandemic under control have been demanding to say the least. There doesn’t seem to have been any aspect of life which has remained untouched and that includes our churches and our church families.

We have been compelled to reimagine how we can be church when, for periods, we have not been able to worship in our church buildings, and we have had to get used to sitting apart, only seeing people’s eyes above their masks. The parishes of this diocese have been remarkable in the ways that they have adapted to every new set of circumstances thrust upon us, often at very short notice. It has been a gruelling time to be in church leadership and so we wish to take this opportunity to thank all who have contributed in any way to the task of navigating our churches through this period, and most particularly in this context, we wish to extend our enormous gratitude to all those who have served as Churchwardens. Thank you!

Just as individual churches have had to adapt, the diocese as a whole has had to adapt. The mass movement of meetings onto video conferencing platforms has brought with it challenges, but it has also brought opportunities. One of those opportunities has been the ability to gather people from dispersed places together to be in conversation through Churchwarden Roundtables and Finance Roundtables. We hope that this has enabled greater communication between individual parishes, office holders, and diocesan staff.

As Archdeacons, we have had to work differently, not least because of a change in the team early last year as the Ven Jonathan Smith retired as Archdeacon of St Albans, with Jane Mainwaring taking up the role in mid-March.

As we look ahead, the rest of this Visitation News contains articles which will help us focus forward to the joys and challenges beyond COVID. Thank you for being part of the Body of Christ in this Diocese. We are grateful for all the wonderful individuals who we are so privileged to work and minister alongside as we continue to build the Kingdom of God together.

Many of us grew up loving the ‘Narnia’ books of C.S. Lewis. ‘The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe’ begins in a world where it is ‘Always Winter but Never Christmas’. Writing as I am in the middle of our third lockdown, such a phrase captures how many of us feel right now, and may well still be feeling by the time this Visitation News arrives with you. Yet while this might feel like how things are, it’s not our reality. Millions have had the jab. Infection rates are falling. Days are getting longer. All this means our response cannot be one of ‘Always Winter but Never Christmas’. Rather it must be ‘Spring is here and Christ is Risen!’ For the greatest contribution we can offer in these days is hope. Not mere wishful thinking, but real assurance based in our lived experience of God’s goodness, love and faithfulness that will never let us down and that spurs us to join with God into building a better world now. That’s what our churches and their ministry are for. So welcome to this Visitation News as together we seek to live out our calling.

The Rt Revd Dr Michael Beasley
Bishop of Hertford

The Venerable Janet Mackenzie
The Archdeacon of Hertford

The Venerable Dave Middlebrook
The Archdeacon of Bedford

The Venerable Dr Jane Mainwaring
The Archdeacon of St Albans
Safeguarding

In regard to safeguarding, 2020/2021 is probably best defined by the report and recommendations of the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (IICSA).

The report concluded that the Church of England failed to protect some children and young people from sexual predators within their midst. During the Inquiry’s hearings, senior leaders in the Church apologised for its actions, recognising that failings identified were ‘profoundly and deeply shocking’.

The recommendations from this report have been accepted by General Synod.

The National Safeguarding Team have increased their staff in order to meet the challenges. This means that the speed of change, including policy and guidance updates, is increasing. I am acutely aware of the pressures to the diocese and the knock-on effect to parishes and those with safeguarding responsibilities as a church leader. It is more important than ever that we reach the standards set in the House of Bishops Policies and Practice Guidance.

To help parishes, the diocese:
• has updated the safeguarding pages on the website with a specific page ‘Help for Parishes’;
• will offer training to ensure that parishes are equipped to meet the challenges;
• will update you through safeguarding newsletters about developments and make clear parish responsibilities;
• will continue to provide and encourage use of the Parish Safeguarding Dashboard to all parishes who are not currently using it.

Parish Safeguarding Dashboard

The Diocese introduced the Parish Safeguarding Dashboard in 2019. It is easy to use, free to parishes and has been well received with over 50% of parishes subscribing so far. We are aiming for 100% participation.

The dashboard is not something additional to what you already do. It is a way of keeping your safeguarding records together with an easy system identifying whether you are compliant with current safeguarding requirements. It operates on a red/amber/green system, that clearly indicates where requirements are complete, partially complete, or outstanding.

Not only will this give you the chance to monitor your safeguarding responsibilities in one place, but it will enable the diocesan safeguarding team to have oversight of all the parishes that participate, and help us identify and support those who may struggle.

The Dashboard can be printed off as an Action Plan for your parish. This can be taken to a PCC meeting to agree a plan to complete outstanding actions.

Jez Hirst
Diocesan Safeguarding Adviser

‘Living in Love and Faith’

‘Living in Love and Faith’, published in November 2020, is the much-awaited episcopal teaching document on Human Sexuality for the Church of England. It brings together major study in the fields of theology, church history, biblical studies and social and biological sciences with regard to human sexuality and has been described as the most comprehensive set of resources ever produced with which to explore the Church’s understanding on human sexuality.

As well as the main volume which is available to buy or download, there is a five-part course for small groups to use and there are also videos and other resources available.

Throughout 2021, we want to encourage as many people across the Diocese as possible to join small groups to engage with the material, to share in this reflection and discernment and to help us to feed our experiences back to the national Church. Because of the pandemic, these will be facilitated as online meetings and every parish and chaplaincy in the Diocese will be sent a copy of the five-session course material to encourage widespread take-up. In the first instance, we will be holding up to 20 online groups predominantly attended by clergy, readers and other licensed ministers. We hope that having engaged with the course themselves, they will then be the facilitators for further groups to take place in the contexts where they minister.

We want this process to be invitational rather than prescriptive. It may be that some deaneries would like to form a group to share in the material, whilst others may prefer to do the course with people they don’t know or who hold different views to their own. We recognise that this is not an easy topic and feelings run deep. Throughout the process, we will be striving to create a climate of trust, confidentiality and openness so that we can really hear what the Spirit is saying to the Church on this matter. The material rightly focusses on case studies and real people.

Whilst it is an area where there are many different views, we hope that this will be a positive and enriching experience for all.

The Revd Will Gibbs
LLF Advocate for St Albans Diocese
will@stmarysredbourn.org

‘Living in Love and Faith’

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Our Church Insurance Consultants are right behind you

Meet Ecclesiastical’s Church Insurance Consultants – a friendly and approachable team of highly knowledgeable insurance experts who are right on your doorstep and ready to offer guidance and help with any insurance or risk-related issues you might have.

From a simple explanation of the basics of your policy, to guidance on how to combat thieves and vandals, guard against fire, and improve general health and safety, they are there for you, free of charge.

The team – (from top left) Chris, Rebecca, Heather, Lynne, Peter, Nicky, Kay and Derek – are all deeply passionate about customer service, and our country’s amazing churches.

Amongst them are theologians, choristers, regular churchgoers, and people who have worked with Christian charities here and abroad, so they really understand your specific needs. And because they’re based at regional locations all over the UK, they’re also able to tailor their advice to your local requirements.

They have decades of combined industry experience – and standing behind them is Ecclesiastical’s 134 years of unrivalled expertise and insight in dealing with everything life might throw at you.

Where possible, the Church Insurance Consultants love to meet customers and talk face-to-face, and are happy to host networking events where you can get to know people from other parishes and share experience, ideas – and smiles.

But if we find ourselves in a COVID-19 lockdown or you’re simply unable to meet them in person, they’re still there, offering exactly the same services online or over the telephone.

To find out more about the team, and how they could help you and your church, please visit: www.ecclesiastical.com/church/cic or email meetus@ecclesiastical.com (please include your contact details, the name of your church and parish, and policy number if possible), or call them on 0345 777 3322.

Information at your fingertips

Have you visited the Ecclesiastical website recently? It’s had a bit of a facelift and looks really good. It is also full of advice and information about a wide range of risk management topics and includes Made Simple Guides about building works, people on premises and property. You will also find information about church, home, commercial and legal insurance and how to make a claim. You can also read an online copy of Ecclesiastical’s bi-annual newsletter, Church Matters!

Explore the website at www.ecclesiastical.com/church

Make your good news a headline story!

This year, Ecclesiastical’s church competition shines a light on churches across the UK – their bright ideas and success stories, community heroes and ingenuity in the face of adversity.

It’s easy to overlook the important things that keep church communities strong, especially at difficult times, which is why we’re looking for your uplifting stories that support church activities and bring the community together.

Tell us about your moments of inspiration, your clever solutions to problems old and new, and the people who’ve solved them – we want to hear your good news stories that can make front page headlines.

Find out more about the competition and how your church can enter at www.ecclesiastical.com/churchcomp
#churchgoodnews
How online fundraising can boost your church

With summer around the corner, you may be starting to think about future events and how to raise those ever-important funds. Many churches have been looking at running events online, and it might be the best way forward at the moment. Ecclesiastical has put together some great ideas and top tips to get you started or increase your online success.

To get started, have fun and think creatively. What do you do face-to-face and how could that translate to online? Quizzes are great fun and easy to put together. You could have a quiz master read out the questions over a Zoom call, share your screen to display visual questions, or circulate quiz sheets via email and social media. How about streaming an online choir concert, or run craft or baking classes via Teams and sell virtual tickets to your Internet audience? Another idea is to offer the opportunity to request a favourite hymn in return for a donation.

More and more churches are using the Internet to reach not just their congregation and the wider community, but potential supporters literally everywhere. Online community groups and social media outlets like Twitter, Instagram and Facebook are a great way to publicise your activity to a new, wider audience – and particularly younger people who are otherwise hard to reach.

Ask them to sponsor a personal challenge and invite them to come up with their own challenges to benefit your church. Fundraising sites like JustGiving.com are quick to set up and can easily be widely promoted online. The Internet is also ideal for keeping everyone up to date, which is essential to keep those donations coming in. If you haven’t dabbled yet, maybe have a look at what another church or community organisation has done.

If you find the Internet a bit daunting, once you strip away the jargon it’s often much simpler than it appears. For instance, ‘streaming’ might sound difficult and mysterious, but user-friendly services such as Microsoft Teams are easy to download and can be used by lots of people joining in on their PCs, smartphones, or tablets.

Supporters can buy virtual ‘tickets’ – or make donations – via dedicated online fundraising platforms like TapSimple.org or Eventbrite.co.uk, which offer a one-stop process from hosting your event to processing payments and contributions. Many of them will handle Gift Aid for you too.

Fundraising in a Box

Earlier this year, Ecclesiastical sent out a ‘Fundraising in a Box’ kit to its church customers containing four booklets giving guidance and support to make the fundraising journey easier. For more information and guidance, including some really helpful webinars, please visit the Ecclesiastical fundraising hub at www.ecclesiastical.com/church/fundraising (if you are an Ecclesiastical customer and require further copies of the box, please contact us via the website).

Have you heard the e-news?

E-news is a monthly email full of tips and information for all Ecclesiastical church customers and anyone in your church community. To receive it is easy – all you need to do is register on their website at www.ecclesiastical.com/signup and if at any time you decide you no longer want to receive it, you can click the ‘unsubscribe’ button at the bottom of the email. Feel free to pass on the sign-up website to anyone you think might like it.
Three cheers for roof alarms and SmartWater®!

Churches with these systems have found it’s had a positive impact on reducing the risk of metal theft.

SmartWater® recently helped Police convict four criminals responsible for stealing metal from 35 churches located in Midlands, East Anglia and the South-West. And a roof alarm helped St Bartholomew’s in Lancashire to scare off attackers not once, but three times in the same month.

St Bartholomew’s has a ‘monitored roof alarm’ which sends out an audible warning on site, and alerts the alarm-receiving centre of movement on the church roof. The centre contacted the church’s key-holder, and neighbours called the Police. As a result, offenders were arrested on site with tools in hand.

Lead and copper roofing are materials that characterise our beautiful churches – but thieves love it too, and churches are often a target. As COVID-19 restrictions ease, Ecclesiastical anticipate organised crime will return to target less well-protected areas of lead. The good news is there’s positive actions you can take to protect your church.

A roof alarm is one, particularly if your church has significant amounts of metal. Ask Ecclesiastical for a list of approved installers. An approved forensic security marking solution such as SmartWater® is another. This is a clever liquid like DNA that you apply to external metal. It’s unique to your church so items can be traced back to you. You must register it with the supplier and display signage, which acts as a deterrent. Using a forensic solution is a condition of your theft of metal cover. If you choose SmartWater®, Ecclesiastical will register it for you, saving you £120.

Thieves are likely to use a vehicle to carry their heavy stolen metal away. Restrict vehicle access with locked gates, fences and bollards.

Consider installing security lighting and cut back trees that might conceal criminals as they work.

Rebuilding stronger from COVID-19

Churches and Christian charities throughout the UK and Ireland have received more than £3.8 million in funding to support their communities to rebuild stronger in response to the coronavirus pandemic.

Allchurches Trust’s Hope Beyond programme has supported more than 500 projects aimed at tackling loneliness, boosting mental health and building digital resilience. While the programme has now closed, Allchurches – the charitable owner of Ecclesiastical Insurance Group – is currently considering the next phase of its COVID-19 response.

St Luke’s Healthcare for the clergy has received £20,000 Hope Beyond funding to offer counselling and therapy to support clergy and their families suffering as a result of COVID-19, giving them increased resilience and skills as they help the most vulnerable.

Shine – the community organisation working with St Stephen’s Church in West Bowling, Bradford – will use its £5,500 Hope Beyond grant to transform a basement room into a counselling space, which leads onto a tranquil garden ideal for wellbeing groups.

Risk helpline

The Ecclesiastical Risk Advice Line is available 9am-5pm Monday to Friday (except bank holidays).

Call: 0345 600 7531
Email: risk.advice@ecclesiastical.com

To find out more about funding, and advice and resources for churches, head to www.allchurches.co.uk

Taking a sabbatical in 2022

Ecclesiastical’s Ministry Bursary Awards provide financial support for members of the clergy taking extended study leave, and they are now accepting applications for sabbaticals taking place in 2022. You can find out more about the awards, check the eligibility criteria and apply on the website.

Find out more: www.ecclesiastical.com/mba

1 BBC News, 6 January 2021.
Ecclesiastical has donated more than £430,000 to churches around the UK as part of their Trust130 campaign and it’s been particularly helpful during the pandemic. Even the smallest amounts can make a big difference.

St Mark’s and All Saints churches in West Parley, in the Diocese of Salisbury, are like many other churches – Treasurer Derek Warner is looking at a shortfall of between £15,000 and £18,000 for the year. Ecclesiastical’s recent Trust130 donation of £650 went into general funds, and was a welcome addition.

‘It’s been extremely tough,’ said Mr Warner. ‘We have had no congregations, so obviously that means no collections. But even more importantly, we have lost all of our income from church hall lettings. We have survived by eating into our capital, and I’m looking at ways of cutting our budgets for 2021.’

‘Donations such as the Trust130 money from Ecclesiastical Insurance are absolutely vital – they are really interested in helping churches and their communities and we’re very grateful to them.’

Trust130 continues into 2021 to help and support churches

Ecclesiastical is really pleased to be extending the offer to run throughout 2021. Supporting your church is easy. Simply take out a home insurance policy with Ecclesiastical and they will donate £130 to the church of your choice. And, of course, the more people who take out home insurance policies, the more funds that are raised. So even if you’ve got a really ambitious goal – like raising funds for a new church roof – there’s nothing to stop you.

Want to know more?

It really is wonderful to hear how this programme is helping customers and the things that matter to them. You can hear more about what some customers are saying in a brand-new film clip on Ecclesiastical’s website – simply go to the website to watch:

www.ecclesiastical.com/trust130

If you would like a home insurance quote or more information, simply call 0800 7830 130 and quote AVNEWS21.

Trust130.
Limitless donations.
Endless possibilities.
Becoming an eco church

How Churchwardens can play a key role in helping the Church meet its target of net zero by 2030.

Whether your parish has an ancient church surrounded by a fine churchyard or an architect-designed building situated among commercial and high-rise developments, as Churchwarden your role is key in enabling your parish to respond to the multiple challenges facing our church communities at the present time. By working to become more sustainable as part of our Christian witness, our churches can provide a working example of how changes in operations and lifestyles can protect creation, bringing hope to communities already facing the effects of climate change, in this country and across the world. As Churchwardens, you can encourage your church to use resources efficiently, protect God’s creation – and save money, too.

Participation in the eco church programme is one way to improve your church’s sustainability. This free online self-assessment tool devised by the Christian environmental charity A Rocha UK covers all aspects of church life in five main areas: Worship and Teaching, Buildings, Land, Community and Global engagement, and Lifestyle. As churches progress through three levels to achieve Bronze, Silver and Gold awards, the scheme provides focus for the whole parish and is both challenging and enjoyable. Case studies and information on how to register can be found on our Diocesan website: Eco Church – Diocese of St Albans (anglican.org).

Energy is one important area where even small steps can improve energy efficiency and reduce the carbon emissions that cause climate change. Resources and advice on funding for a range of actions are available on the Diocesan and Church of England websites and from the expert team of the DAC.

Measuring your energy consumption and tracking your progress in reducing your carbon footprint is now possible by using the Energy Footprint Tool (EFT) incorporated in the online parish return system. The EFT is a simple easy-to-use calculator, designed to collect data that will form a baseline against which your energy savings can be measured in the future. It will also enable the Diocese to calculate its own carbon footprint, and to measure progress towards the Church of England’s target of achieving net zero carbon by 2030. Keen churches can progress to measure carbon emissions from other areas of their church’s operations using the Carbon 360 tool from Climate Stewards.

Rachel Johnston
Diocesan Environment Officer
environment@stalbans.anglican.org

Caring for churches

While the pandemic has had a huge impact on our church life and witness, church buildings have remained a reassuring presence and shown their value in quite different ways. Churches are places where food and support has been given to those needing help, and churchyards have been quiet refuges to reflect and refresh. Churches have been ‘sets’ for online services, whilst we long to meet again for a coffee, playgroup or worship under the church roof.

Inviting and cared-for churches show the love and dedication of Churchwardens and other volunteers from the parish, fabric committee, friends and wider community. Volunteers responsible for keeping the church going every week have had a particularly tough time with changing restrictions, requirements and routines, and worries over health and safety. These amazing and vital people have kept the show on the road, taking the necessary steps, keeping an eye on the church, giving it some air and dealing with routine maintenance.

Checks, maintenance and housekeeping will be needed as we come safely out of lockdown. Regular maintenance including inspections will be especially important in the next couple of years as hits on parish and national finances make it harder to fund some repair projects.

Regular maintenance and small ‘stitch in time’ repairs have proved to be excellent value for money. They stop damage and costs rising month after month. Checking that no roof tiles have slipped, rainwater runs freely through gutters, downpipes and channels, and there have been no break-ins or windows broken is key. Inspections of heating and other equipment should be arranged on time. Any problems found should be followed up and dealt with.

Reading your Quinquennial Inspection Report and having a good look around the church with fresh eyes will help you understand it and the way it performs. See what the report has to say about maintenance. Talk to your Quinquennial Inspector if anything isn’t clear or if you need advice on carrying it out or hiring a contractor. Prepare a maintenance plan and decide what parish volunteers, maintenance contractors and others need to do and when. Arrange for a contractor to check your roofs and rainwater system and clear blockages twice a year.

See our Church Maintenance webpage and SPAB’s Maintenance Matters for much more information and contact the DAC team for help and advice.

Emma Critchley, DAC Secretary
David Bevan, Church Buildings Support Officer
Mission and Ministry in the Diocese

Recently, following a period of consultation, the decision was taken to merge the Mission and Ministry Departments and to re-organise several of the staff posts. This was partly due to the need to make financial savings, and also to enhance a more collaborative approach to work across the important areas of mission and ministry, within the diocese. Revd Canon Tim Bull (formerly Director of Mission) is now Director of Vocations, Revd Canon Tim Lomax is the Director of Mission and Ministry and Revd Kate Peacock is Deputy Director of Mission and Ministry.

As a department, we are here to support you in the following ways:

1) Support for your Church(es)
   We can assist you in Mission Action Planning; Leading Your Church into Growth training; reaching new people through new ways of being church; giving and stewardship; online worship; youth, children’s and families’ work; social action, the environment and ECO parish awards; interfaith matters; training for Lay Leaders (including Lay Leaders of Worship, Foundations, Pioneer Enablers).

2) Support for Lay and Ordained Leaders
   We are also here to help with vocations to Ordained Ministry and Reader Ministry; initial ministry training for Curates and Readers; clergy and Lay Leader care and wellbeing (including the counselling service, Support in Your Ministry, support for retired clergy and Self-supporting Ministers); Continuing Ministry Development (including training in coaching, leadership, change management and conflict management); and Mission and Ministry Development.

Reviews for clergy. We also provide clergy and readers with a small annual training grant.

Please do get in touch with the department if we can help. We would love to work with you in any of the ways mentioned above. Visit the website to contact us and find out more: www.stalbans.anglican.org/diocese/whos-who-mission-ministry/

Canon Tim Lomax
Director of Mission and Ministry

Faith in Young People

Young People are vital and joyous members of our churches, often sharpening our missional activity and contributing prophetically as we serve our communities. I’d encourage you to read and consider a new report called Faith in Young People [link below], which highlights the challenges and opportunities we face together in St Albans Diocese. The report underlines the need for us to renew our support of young people and I am developing a new strategy to partner with you in this vital area of ministry. I would be grateful to hear the experiences and insights from your churches and if I can encourage, help or pray for you, please don’t hesitate to get in touch.

Christian Cole, Youth Missioner
ccole@stalbans.anglican.org 07766542492

If you have questions regarding your Churchwarden role, the good news is, so does everyone else! We place much of our information that is aimed at helping to make your job easier on www.stalbans.anglican.org/diocese/churchwardens/. If you can’t find what you need, please call the Archdeacons’ PAs. We’re here to help!