

Fasting or Famine

As I write this letter, the United Nations' Under-Secretary-General, Stephen O'Brien has declared that the world is facing its largest humanitarian crisis in 72 years. Having just returned from a visit to the region, he warned that more than 20 million people are at risk of starvation and famine in Yemen, Somalia, South Sudan and Kenya. The media has followed the story up with photos of emaciated people patiently queuing for food. The pictures and the stories, especially of children and babies, are heart breaking.

One of the tragic features of this particular crisis is that the famine is largely man-made and has been caused by conflict and war. This is likely to make the humanitarian response even harder as attempts are made to get food to the neediest people over the coming weeks.

This crisis is unfolding against the backdrop of our observance of Lent, a time when Christians undertake self-examination, and when we fast and pray. These are good spiritual disciplines to undertake in their own right and they can break the power of our addictions and compulsions. However, in the Hebrew Scriptures, another important aspect of fasting is to focus our thoughts and our actions outwards to others. This is how the prophet Isaiah put it, speaking the words of God to his people:

Is not this the fast that I choose:
to loose the bonds of injustice,
to undo the thongs of the yoke,
to let the oppressed go free,
and to break every yoke?

Is it not to share your bread with the hungry,
and bring the homeless poor into your house;
when you see the naked, to cover them,
and not to hide yourself from your own kin?
(Isaiah 58. 6-8)



Dr Alan Smith,
Bishop of St Albans

Having journeyed through Lent, we are brought to the most important feast in the Christian Year. Easter is, above all, a celebration rooted in the idea that God is the One who defeats death and suffering. He is the life-giver, the One who brings resurrection life.

One of the practical spiritual disciplines that we can undertake as we prepare for Easter is to practice generosity – generosity in our daily prayers for the those suffering; generosity in talking to others about the crisis and encourage them to do something positive; generosity by giving to those agencies which are working on the ground, bringing humanitarian relief to the suffering. These are the spiritual disciplines, rooted in daily life and action, which can declare that we are a life-giving, resurrection people. I hope every parish, school and chaplaincy in the diocese will have a special collection towards the relief of famine, as an expression of the generous love of God.

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Among those aid agencies working with the DEC in the areas affected by famine, who are happy to accept donations are:
Christian Aid (www.christianaid.org.uk) and
Tear Fund (www.tearfund.org)



HELP SAVE LIVES

Clergy Appointments

Geoffrey Boulton, presently Priest-in-Charge in the benefice of Arlesley with Astwick, is to become Incumbent of the same.

Myrtle Cook, presently Priest-in-Charge (house for duty) in the benefice of High Cross & Thundridge is to retire with PTO in June.

Rebecca Fardell, presently Assistant Curate in the benefice of Itohen Valley, Winchester diocese, is to become Vicar in the benefice of Sunnyside with Bourne End.

Lydia Humphries, presently Vicar of The Church of the Transfiguration, Kempston, is to become Vicar of St Botolphs Church, Shepshed and St James Church, Oaks in Charnwood, Leicester diocese.

Ricky Turner, presently Assistant Curate in Training at All Saints Church, Oxhey, is to become Team Vicar in Dunstable Team Ministry with responsibility for St Augustine's Church, Dunstable.

Diocesan Appointments



The Revd Dr James Webster, previously Assistant Curate in the Parish of Broxbourne with Wormley, was appointed as Vicar of St Paul's Langleybury and Diocesan IME Officer at the end of last year. He took over the roles from The Revd Ysmena Pentelov.

Farewell to Jeanette



The Revd Jeanette Gosney, widely known in the diocese, tells us a bit more about her forthcoming move in June. "I'm going to be Bishops' Ministry Officer, working with and for the two bishops in the diocese of St Edmundsbury and Ipswich (basically Suffolk). It's a new post, so exactly what I'll be doing will evolve, but, to quote my job description, the job's purpose is 'to support the Bishops in their responsibility for the development and well-being of the clergy and authorised ministers of the diocese'. This will include 'fostering a culture of mutual learning and support' (i.e. encouraging clergy to work together) and 'share ideas – not always a given!' and 'facilitating coaching, mentoring, support groups, pastoral care and strengthening networks... to promote ministerial confidence... and address isolation'. In other words, in a large, mainly rural diocese with relatively few clergy each often looking after several parishes, it's a role seeking to enhance ministerial morale when the pressures and demands of the role can feel

her well.



The Revd Richard Andrews and The Revd Lynne Fawns were made Honorary Canons of the Cathedral & Abbey Church of St Alban by the Bishop of St Albans, on Saturday 4th March during evensong.

Churches have weeks left to join Energy Basket



Parish Buying, which negotiates special deals on a range of products and services for Church of England churches, is urging churches to sign up to their 2017-18 'Energy Basket' before the **1st May deadline**.

The energy basket is a way of pooling the bulk-purchasing power of the church to obtain competitive prices for parishes' electricity and gas, buying wholesale. It's a once a year opportunity. Last year's energy basket covered over 4000 gas or electricity meters.

It's not just about the savings, say Parish Buying. In fact, **www.parishbuying.org.uk**



New role for Archdeacon Jonathan

Archdeacon Jonathan Smith has accepted Bishop Alan's request to take over as the Chair of Council for Discipleship and Ministry when Anthony Archer steps down on 31st May. Jonathan will take on the role as an interim Chair while the future structure of the Boards and Councils is considered.

Jonathan writes: "I am delighted to have been asked to take on the role of interim Chair of the Council for Discipleship and Ministry and I shall very much enjoy working with the Council as together we take forward the work of ministry which is inherent in the calling to be a disciple of Jesus Christ."

Sleepout seeks new future after another bumper year



Just some of the school students who took part in 2016's Sleepout

With sponsorship and tax claims still coming in, the 23rd Sleepout raised over £58,000, the third year in succession that fundraising to support homeless people has broken the £50,000 barrier and currently just below the 2014 record. Over 23 years, £676,000 has been raised.

2016's Sleepout may possibly have been the last in its present form. In 2017 and 2018, the extensive works at St Albans Abbey will mean that a large marquee covers a significant portion of the south churchyard where much of the Sleepout takes place and the Sleepout Committee has taken the difficult decision that without that space, it would be unwise to go ahead.

Sleepout began in 1993 under the then Social Responsibility Officer for the diocese, the Revd (now the Ven) Paul Hackwood, now Chief Executive of the Church Urban Fund. The Sleepout Committee has been chaired since 1996 by Cllr Brian Peyton, who took on Sleepout when he was Mayor of St Albans. Under his chairmanship the number of charities and the geographical area they cover has increased. Last year, eleven charities took part

from all over St Albans Diocese. Some of the charities which regularly take part in Sleepout are holding their own Sleepout events this year. Others are keen to find venues where they and a small number of local charities working with homeless people can host their own event. Watch this space!

The need

Crisis, the national charity for homeless people since 1967, says that homelessness is much bigger than the problem of rough sleeping. The Government estimates that 4,134 people slept rough on any night in 2016 a rise of 16% on the previous year. Compare that to the 57,500 statutory homeless households which local authorities have a duty to house and the 275,000 people who approached their local authorities for help with homelessness last year. These figures also exclude the hidden homeless how sleep in hostels or on sofas with friends or family and the problem takes on different proportions. See www.crisis.org.uk

Tackling Church Repairs – Meeting the Challenge

A church's list of repairs in an architect's report can seem overwhelming. How can we do all of that and what comes first? And where will we find the money? There are many good reasons to be confident about and celebrate our churches, which can in turn increase support from communities and funders. St Michael and all Angels, Shefford, (see below) has recently succeeded at obtaining Heritage Lottery development funding for the project to restore their 14th century tower, currently scaffold-clad to deliver funding.



because of poor repairs in the 1980s, which allowed moisture retention behind rendering on the tower, causing some of it to fall. An initial £19,300 has been granted for project development, before they apply for a full grant of £220,900.

A workshop for parishes, 'Tackling Church Repairs,' at the end of March in Linslade drew about 60 delegates from all over the diocese and aimed to give some answers to these questions and also help churches to unlock funding from sources such as the Heritage Lottery Fund, just like St Michael's.

Bruce Deacon, a church architect talked about how a sensible, incremental, approach with works carried out over a number of years could achieve good results. Advice was given on how to select and work with your professional adviser and how to plan and organise your repairs project.

The church surveyor and parish members from St Mary's, Baldock described how they had successfully found Lottery

parishes which had come up with the best local fundraising ideas at the workshop were given Real Easter Eggs: Fairtrade chocolate Easter Eggs with the Easter story.

Feedback on the workshop has been very positive with people valuing both the talks and the conversations in between. And special praise was rightly given for the fantastic welcome and food at the Community Hall.

See: Fundraising and Grants www.stalbans.anglican.org/finance/fundraising-and-grants/ for advice and where you can get help. Information from the workshop including most of the presentations will be added to www.stalbans.anglican.org/finance/training-events-presentations/

BREAKING NEWS: Successful Heritage Lottery Fund Bid

St Michael's and All Angels is situated in Shefford High Street and is also next to a busy pathway. The church is open 7 days a week and is used by a wide section of the community for a variety of activities. Its historic tower is currently obscured by safety fencing and scaffolding to protect the public. Restoration will give pedestrians safe, unrestricted access to the footpath and greatly enhance the appearance of the church. St Michael's successfully applied for Heritage Lottery development funding after advice from their surveyor that they should make an application. Their strong local team and support from the Diocesan Advisory Team, including the recently appointed Historic Church Buildings Support Officer, David Bevan, have all helped get them to the development funding stage which is often the major hurdle to overcome.



Standing in solidarity in Luton



Following the atrocity in Westminster on Wednesday 22nd March, Grassroots and the Luton Council of Faiths were among the many people and groups to hold public demonstrations, prayer meetings and other gatherings of solidarity to show unity. They did this to stand against division and "to strengthen the collective hope that lies in our shared humanity."

People gathered outside Luton Town Hall. They came together, deeply shocked, saddened and grieved by the cowardly and depraved terror attack.

Ordinary people of all faiths and other beliefs came. Civic and Community leaders came, including the Mayor of Luton, Clir Tahir Khan and the Chair of the Luton Council of Faiths, Zaffar Khan. Senior Police came.

In a joint statement issued before the vigil, Grassroots and the Luton Council of Faiths said: "It has left the painful scar on Londoners, the entire country and many citizens of the

world who were visiting our spectacular city, London."

The statement continued: "Those who share similar evil & extremist ideologies, for their gains, will take advantage of such incidents to drive communities further apart.

As people from different faiths and cultures in Luton, we will not be driven apart. We commit to stay united by our common humanity and work for the common good while condemning such evil acts in strongest terms.

Our message is loud and clear – hate mongers, extremists and terrorists have no place in our civil and democratic society. We should all be united and vigilant towards such evildoers and support one another."

During the vigil, Chair of the Luton Council of Faiths, Zaffar Khan applauded and commended the reaction of the public and community leaders across the country for their striking a note of communities standing together against such atrocities.



L to R: David Jonathan, Grassroots and the Mayor of Luton, Tahir Khan, Peter Adams, St Mary's Church, the Revd Bonnie Evans, Hills, Diocesan Inter Faith Adviser, Rehana, Faisal, Luton and Sutton Council of Mosques, Chief Superintendent Dave Boyle, Imam Alama Hatz Elaz Almeh, Luton Central Mosque