

### Concerts & Drama

**St. Swithun's, Sandy:** Christmas Concert with the Stotfold Salvation Army Band on **Wednesday 6th December** at 7pm in aid of The Leprosy Mission. Also taking part are the pupils from St. Swithun's C. of E. Voluntary Controlled Primary School and Singing-Duo, Doreen Lawrence and Maureen Wilson. Tickets are £4 each available from Colin Osborne (telephone 01767 682032) or on the door on the night. Refreshments will be served during the interval.

#### St Albans Cathedral, AL1 1BY

There are several events over the Christmas & New Year period including: St Albans Bach Choir Carol Concerts - **9th December:** 'Carols on the hour' from 11am till 4pm on **Saturday 16th December:** 'Carols at Christmas' Concert in aid of The Hospice of St Francis - **Sunday 17th December:** New Years Concert by St Albans Symphony Orchestra - **1st January:** Classical Guitar Recital by Michael Butten **Saturday 24th February:** Liturgical Ensemble of Period Chamber Music performance - **Saturday 24th March:** All events, tickets and times can be found in detail on [www.stalbenscathedral.org/whatson/christmas](http://www.stalbenscathedral.org/whatson/christmas)

**St John's Church, Harpenden:** Coffee Concert by organist Roger Carter on **Saturday 9th December** at 10.30am. Admission free, retiring collection.

#### All Saints Church, Hertford

SoundBites - a weekly concert series on Wednesdays. Food from 12noon, free concert from 1pm. Spring Season starts January 2018 and runs 'till March. **January 10th** - Gelachter Wind Trio; **January 17th** - Bellazona Brass; **January 24th** - Alexander Ardakov (piano); **January 31st** - Duo Stielae (violin & piano). Details from [www.allsaintshertford.org/concerts.php](http://www.allsaintshertford.org/concerts.php).

**Christ Church & St John's, Radlett** are organising an event featuring Pam Rhodes in a version of Songs of Praise on **Thursday 15th March 2018** - also supported by the Phoenix Concert Band and an A Cappella choir. Tickets

£5, £3 under 16s. From Christ Church Office: 01923 859963 or Brian Davis: 01923 856611

### Open Days & Festivals

**St Paul's Church, St Paul's Sq, Bedford, MK40 1SQ:** Christmas Tree Festival **Wednesday 6th - Sunday 10th December**, open daily 10-4pm and 12-4pm Sunday. There will be a festival concert by Cellophany cello octet on **Saturday 9th at 7pm**, tickets from 01234 340163 / 783181. To book a stall at the fair or Christmas tree to decorate please contact 01234 340163 [www.stpaulschurchbedford.org.uk/](http://www.stpaulschurchbedford.org.uk/)

**St Mary's Watford** Annual Christmas Tree Festival. **7th-10th December.** Opening **Thursday 7th December** 6 - 9pm with carols and seasonal refreshments. Friday and Saturday 9am - 6pm with a Live Nativity organised by Christians Across Watford outside the church from 11am on Saturday. Sunday 12 noon to 4pm closing with Christingle Service. Festival Café running throughout the event.

**St Mary's Church, Aston:** Christmas Tree Festival on **Friday 8th December** (6-8pm) **Saturday 9th** (12pm-4pm) and **Sunday 10th** (12pm-4pm) followed by carols around the trees at 4pm. Mulled wine will be available throughout. Entry £3 per adult, children free.

#### All Saints Houghton Conquest

Christmas Tree Festival on **Friday 8th December** (6-8.30pm) **Saturday 9th** (10-4pm) with 9 lessons and carols at 6.30pm) **Sunday 10th** (11-4pm). Admission free but donations appreciated.

#### St Saviour's Church St Albans AL1

**4DF** Christmas Tree Festival with 90 trees on the theme 'Community at Christmas'. Opens **Saturday 16th December** at noon and continues until 5pm on **23rd December**. Entry is free but donations welcomed. There will be several other events during the week, please visit [www.ssaviours.org](http://www.ssaviours.org) for details of services, films, music and festival cafe.

**St Paul's Church Bedford, MK40 1SQ:** Celebrate Candlemas with us at a Candlemas Flower Festival. **Friday 2nd February** 10am-4pm, **Saturday 3rd** 10am-4pm, **Sunday 4th** 2pm-4pm. Refreshments will be available. Festival Choral Evensong **Sunday 4th February** 5.30pm. Further details: 01234 391962.

### Talks & Courses

#### BELIEF Bedford

Two events:  
Queens Park Faith Tour - Visit three places of worship - a Gurdwara Mosque & Church. **Tuesday 23rd January 2018** 10am-1pm £10 per person payable on the day.

The Very Reverend Dr Jeffrey John will be returning to BELIEF with a talk entitled: "Making Sense of Scripture". This event will be held on **Saturday 17th February 2018** at St Andrew's Church Centre, Kimbolton Road, Bedford, MK40 2PF. Between 10am and 1pm. £10 per person (including refreshments) payable on the day.

#### New GOLD course in Bedfordshire.

The acronym is 'Group based Open Learning Discipleship project'. The course is aimed at those who want an deep Bible Study course either as Lay Leaders of Worship or home group leaders as well as those who are exploring a Vocation. The course is based locally at Maulden Rectory. Each module is five sessions and tutorials are held fortnightly on a Tuesday evening.

This term we are studying John's Gospel "Discover life". Each course is self contained and students do not have to study all of them. The course is jointly led by Richard richard.janess0@talktalk.net and Lynda Klimas rev.l.klimas@btinternet.com If anyone is interested in joining the course please contact them directly.

## Christmas Countdown



Christmas Countdown: not a quiz show for the verbally and mathematically curious, but a 1 minute video advert for Christmas in church.

It is now live on the diocesan website and social media and intended to support parishes' efforts to reach new people this Christmas.

The video points viewers towards the AChurchNearYou.com website which allows users to find a church or even a Christmas service near to them.

In St Albans Diocese, more than four times as many people come to church at Christmas compared to an average Sunday. Across the diocese, including school, and civic services and Advent, this rises to a quarter of a million people. That means more than 1 in 8 people in the population hearing the Christmas story afresh or renewing their link with it.

Helping people to engage with the Christmas story when they are preparing for Christmas or when they come to church will help them to engage with the Christian faith. The short ad shows a family preparing for Christmas, Christmas activities and services in church.

At the same time, the Mission Department has produced

a helpful checklist to help invite, welcome and relate to visitors this Christmas.

Finding ways of helping Christmas visitors to return sooner than a year is essential to helping them to make the journey from visitor to pilgrim, should they so wish.

### A Church Near You updated

Church-finding website AChurchNearYou.com has been redesigned and re-engineered from the bottom up. With Christmas just around the corner, editors will want to browse the new site and ensure all their church's details are correct, and also spend some time adding their Advent and Christmas services, or updating them with some of the new tags on the site if they haven't already done so.

FAQs for editors are at: [www.achurchnearyou.com/faq/](http://www.achurchnearyou.com/faq/) The major change that editors will notice is that authentication of their identity no longer needs to be done via the diocesan office in most situations, but is done directly online.

## Christmas Mexican-style

Some years ago I went to see Shakespeare's Julius Caesar in a small theatre called The Other Place in Stratford-upon-Avon. It was a venue which specialised in experimental theatre and we had been warned that the audience might get caught up in the drama. I hadn't quite realised that we would be standing for much of the performance and then having to move around as the play unfolded, interacting with the actors. It was so real that by the end of the play I was left feeling that I hadn't just watched a play but that I'd participated in violence and was even partially complicit in a murder!

It is easy to approach the events of Christmas dispassionately and at arm's-length. But if we are to enter into the true meaning of the first Christmas, we too need to become part of the action.

For over 400 years Christians in Mexico have re-enacted the Christmas story each December. They call it Los Posadas. It began with the Spanish Conceptionist monks visiting each other's monasteries, bearing statues of Joseph and Mary. They would knock on the great oak doors of the monastery, asking if there was anyone to welcome them and make room to receive Christ. Soon it was taken up by the local population and before long the tradition of making human sacrifices in honour of the God Huitzilopochtli was transformed from a time of bloodshed into a time of giving and celebration, as they received Christ.



This tradition persists today – and some of our churches and schools here in the diocese have picked it up. In the days leading up to Christmas, families set out, carrying statues of Joseph and Mary, and visit the homes of their



Dr Alan Smith,  
Bishop of St Albans

neighbours. They knock on the door and ask "Is there anyone within who will make space for Christ? Will anyone welcome him?" Symbolically the doors are thrown open and space is made so that they may receive the Christ. The next day the statues are taken onto another home until they finally arrive at the church on Christmas Day.

And here is the great significance of the events of Christmas – Jesus Christ comes to us, our homes, our families. He is not contained in the churches or in the great monasteries of Mexico, but wants to make his home among us in the ordinary places of life, among us, the ordinary people. One of the most familiar carols is a prayer that each one of us will become part of the Christmas story.

Let us make this our prayer this year:

**O holy Child of Bethlehem  
Descend to us, we pray  
Cast out our sin and enter in  
Be born to us today.**

**We hear the Christmas angels  
The great glad tidings tell  
O come to us, abide with us  
Our Lord Emmanuel.**

+ Alan St Albans.  
bishop@stalbans.anglican.org

## Clergy Appointments

**Martin Bailey** presently Rector of the benefice of Riseley with Bletsoe, is to become Associate Vicar at St Paul's Harold Hill and St Thomas' Noak Hill, Chemsford Diocese.

**Wendy Carter** presently holding PTO in Birmingham Diocese, has been appointed Vicar (interim post of 18 months) of the benefice of High Wych and Gilston w. Eastwick.

**Noel Cooper**, presently Rector in the benefice of St John & St Leonard, Bedford is to retire to France in February 2018.

**Mike Jones**, presently Vicar of St Mary's Luton, has also been appointed Priest-in-Charge of St Matthew High Town, Luton.

**Nick Mwandia**, presently holding PTO in the diocese, has become Assistant Curate in Training in the benefice of St Mary's Luton (with pastoral responsibility for St Matthew's High Town).

**Canon Vincent Oram**, presently Vicar of Holy Trinity, Stevenage is to retire in January 2018.

**Abigail Thompson**, presently Vicar of Clifton St James and Dean of Women's Ministry in the Diocese of Sheffield is to become Sub Dean (Residential Canon) of the Cathedral & Abbey Church of St Albans.

**Karen Turner**, presently Priest-in-Charge (house for duty) in the benefice of South Mimms & Ridge is to become Vicar (house for duty) of the same.

## Obituaries

It is with sadness that we announce the death of **Barrie Browning**, Reader Emeritus from Stevenage.

## Diocesan Appointments

**Alison Jackson**, presently Assistant Curate (SSM) in the benefice of St Cuthbert, Rye Park, has been appointed Fresh Expressions Development Officer for Hertford Archdeaconry.

## New Canons



During evensong at St Albans Cathedral on November 11th 2017, the following were installed as Honorary Canons in St Albans Cathedral:

*Left to right:* The Revd Canon Steven Liley, Rural Dean of Sharnbrook and Vicar in the benefice of Clapham. The Revd Canon Ruth Pyke, Rector of the benefice of Barkway, Barley, Reed and Buckland. Miss Susan Pope, Diocesan Secretary of St Albans Diocese (Lay Canon). Bishop of St Albans, The Right Revd Alan Smith. Mr David Morton, Diocesan Director of Education (Lay Canon). The Revd Canon Michael Trodden, Rector of the benefice of Amphill with Millbrook and Steppingly.

## St John's Guild



A new partnership between Redemptorist Publications and St John's Guild will provide large print weekly pew sheets to 2500 Anglican parishes nationwide. From the start of January 2018, Redemptorist will be sending five large print pew sheets to all their Anglican parish customers, to be available in church every week to support Common Worship and the liturgy. The funding to make this possible comes from a new partnership with St John's Guild, Christians Supporting People with Sight Loss.

Offer your hand for international friendship! Welcome an adult international student into your home for a day, weekend, or Christmas and do your bit to make the world a little friendlier. Many international students in the UK feel isolated and would love to spend a short time with you, learning about British culture, experiencing UK home-life, and telling you about their own country. Hosting is a voluntary position available throughout the year with HOST, a charity set up in 1987 by the British Council. To find out more please visit [www.hostuk.org](http://www.hostuk.org) or call 020 7739 6292.



After 10 years service in the Diocesan Communications Team Assistant Editor **Claudia Ashley-Brown** will be leaving to build trees! She has designed and built several 'Memory Trees' for local hospices and will be continuing this work and also the sculptural works such as The Ramfyge Angels on display in St Albans Cathedral. We wish her well.

## Bishop voices concerns for poorest facing household debt

During November, Bishop Alan drew attention in the House of Lords on two occasions to the crisis of household debt facing many in the UK. This was ahead of more recent reports bearing out his concerns.

Among the problems associated with debt are risks to the economy. The Bank of England Financial Policy Committee says rising debt levels pose: "a risk to (Banks') ability to withstand severe economic downturns", and, "they have been underestimating the losses they could incur". Bishop Alan said: "The banking industry has an obligation to heed these warnings and act responsibly. I hope that deep and productive partnerships can be formed between financial institutions and the FCA to make changes that benefit

consumers and encourage them to save, and that the Government will step in to regulate if needed."

Other risks are to individuals. To their lifelong prosperity and their health, dignity and wellbeing. Bishop Alan is particularly concerned about the effects of debt on children and the poorest members of society. He cites rising consumer debt, gambling and benefits freezes as among most significant causes and the ones about which most can be done.

He said three principles should govern how the benefits system works, fairness, generosity, and sustainability.

Speaking after the debates, Bishop Alan said: "The worst effects of debt on individuals are on the very young and other vulnerable people in our society. Child poverty is rising and there is an increasing number of people accessing help for problem gambling who are in debt. Rising levels of child poverty are unacceptable."



Dates have just been announced for Thy Kingdom Come 2018. Last year, Thy Kingdom Come celebrated and dedicated the days between Ascension Day and Pentecost in prayer for new disciples.

### In 2018, the dates for your diary are 10th to 20th May.

One of the new resources for 2018 has already been made available. It is the 'Evangelism for the Local Church booklet', which you can download now. Also, coming soon is a national Lent Course to encourage and enable every Christian in their witness.

Recently, Thy Kingdom Come won the Jerusalem Award for the best short film 'Light' by Luke Bradford and also came second in the Best Digital Campaign category at the Premier Digital Awards! 'Light' is about what happens when the light of Christ shines in the darkness, narrated by Archbishop Justin. The video can be viewed here: <https://vimeo.com/214155802>

## STOP PRESS - Lost Abbot found at St Albans Cathedral

Archaeologists from the Canterbury Archaeological Trust (CAT) working at St Albans Cathedral have discovered the grave of John of Wheathampstead, a former Abbot of national and international renown, who died in 1465, and whose burial site has remained a mystery to this day. In an extremely rare development, the team also discovered three papal seals, known as 'papal bulls', inside the grave, issued by Pope Martin V (1417-1431).

It is the presence of these bulls that confirm that this is the grave of Abbot Wheathampstead. Professor James Clark (University of Exeter), who is an expert on the Abbey's medieval history, has found that early in his career Abbot John secured three special privileges at an audience with Pope Martin and that he was remembered ever after for his great success when visiting the papal court.

The dig is taking place in advance of the construction of a new Welcome Centre, supported by the Heritage Lottery Fund, and part of the Alban, Britain's First Saint' project. Archaeological work continues at St Albans Cathedral until early 2018 and the new Welcome Centre opens in June 2019



## 'Messy Woodwork' connects with Christmas



Clifton and Southill's five-day mission in November with Bishop Richard is still bearing fruit, including in a life-size wooden nativity which has gone up outside All Saints Clifton.

The carpentry was the result of 'Messy Woodwork' which is a new outreach that the church has run a couple of times for younger teenagers and which is also very popular with their dads. It's like "Who let the dads out!" says Rector, Revd Caren Topley. The figures of Mary and Joseph are graced by masks made by Henlow Middle School and the tableau will help welcome visitors to celebrate Christmas at the church.

Messy Woodwork was just once of the highlights Bishop Richard saw during the mission in the benefice. Accompanied by Carrie, Cathy and Lindsay (one potential ordinand and two trainee Readers), and supported by a local team, Bishop Richard and the team were involved in a wide range of events from school assemblies, to an evening of testimony and questions/answers at Southill Park, and conversations with people in three of the local

pubs. It was a time of encouragement, renewal and reaching out.

The mission was part of Clifton's MAP and fitted with the church's work to get everyone in the parish involved in outreach to the community. As well as Messy Church and Toddler Church, the church is open all week and Craft and Chat sessions take place, drawing 30 to 50 as well as the local care scheme, Clifton Care, hosting a drop-in cafe, well attended by older men, many bereaved. One mum from Messy Church commented: "the church is part of the community now."

The combined effect of all these new activities is that 58 people joined the church in 2015 and 110 last year, roughly equal numbers of adults and children. A bumper crop of Crib service attenders has also promoted thought about inviting them back, so the church is launching a new all-age service in January and holding a Christingle at Candlemas.

Watch the crib being built at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bt5k8nL-cvFU&feature=share>

### A Lent Study to learn lessons from the past

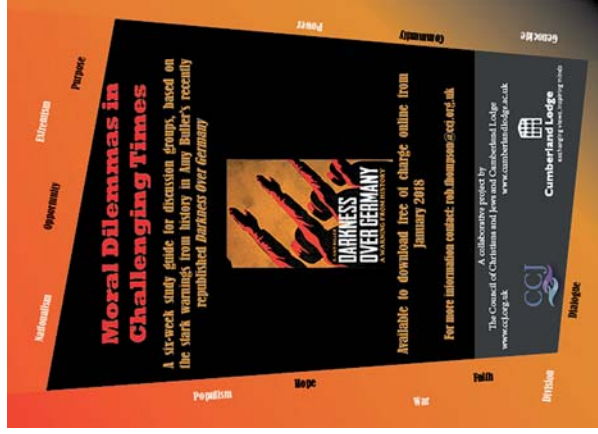
'Moral Dilemmas in Challenging Times' is a new study guide that encourages groups to delve into divisive issues such as nationalism, populism and extremism from a faith perspective, published by the Council of Christians and Jews (CCJ) and the educational foundation, Cumberland Lodge, in time for Lent 2018.

The forward is written by the Revd Bonnie Evans Hills, from this diocese, with guest contributors including Dr Rowan Williams, Rabbi Jonathan Wittenberg (Senior Rabbi of Masorti Judaism) and the novelist and speaker, Salley Vickers.

The brief guide accompanies the new edition of Amy Buller's groundbreaking 1943 book, *Darkness over Germany: A Warning from History*, which explores how young people were drawn into National Socialism in the 1930s and sheds light on many of the most pressing social issues we face in current times. It was this book that inspired King George VI and Queen Elizabeth to establish the educational foundation at Cumberland Lodge in Windsor Great Park in 1947, to try to avoid a repeat of the events of 1930s Germany.

*Moral Dilemmas in Challenging Times* draws on key conversations with Nazi Party members and public figures relayed in *Darkness over Germany*. It offers six short reflections, each with questions for discussion, and is designed to be suitable for Lent courses in churches and other faith settings.

Rowan Williams has described Buller's work as, 'a really remarkable book by a very remarkable woman, who was driven by her Christian faith'. He spoke of the spiritual vacuum that emerged in the inter-war period in Germany, the risks of a generation growing up without hope, seeking a magical 'problem-solver' to meet their needs, and the resonances of 1930s Germany for many of the issues we face today.

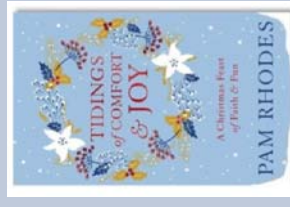


The new guide can be downloaded free of charge from January 2018 from the CCJ website: [www.ccj.org.uk](http://www.ccj.org.uk)  
*Darkness over Germany: A Warning from History* by E. Amy Buller (1943; 2017 edition) is published by Arcadia Books, ISBN 978-1-911350-19-4, RRP £15 and available from all good online book retailers and bookshops.

### Pam Rhodes' Christmas Companion

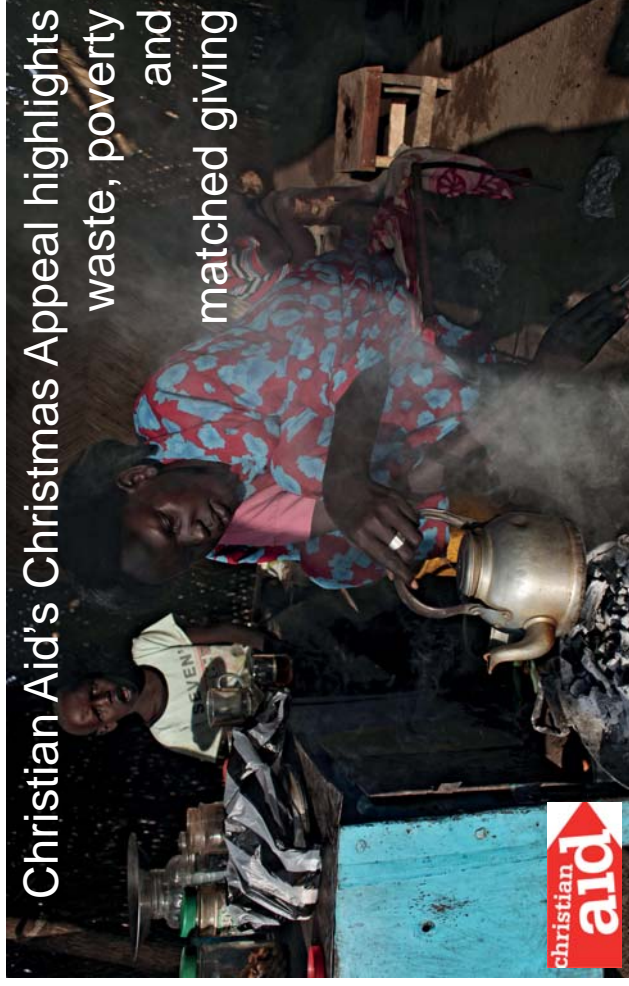
Pam Rhodes, BBC Songs of Praise presenter well known to people in St Albans Diocese, has a new paperback out in time for Christmas.

Her '*Tidings of Comfort and Joy - A Christmas Fear of Faith & Fun*' is a collection of poems, stories, hymns, carols and Bible readings with a Christmas theme. As well as the usual old favourites - from Hark the Herald Angels Sing to the stories of the shepherds and the wise men visiting the baby Jesus - there are plenty of lighter moments, with excerpts from Genevieve Phinn's memoirs and funny poems by modern writers. Alongside the items themselves Pam shares some of her own Christmas reminiscences and explores the resonance of the Christmas story for all our lives in her trademark inviting and heartwarming style.



Hodder & Stoughton 9781473630048 paperback £9.99

### Christian Aid's Christmas Appeal highlights waste, poverty and matched giving



Christian Aid's Christmas Appeal is for children and families in South Sudan and Burkina Faso. The appeal benefits from £2.7m matched funding from HM Government.

At the same time, Christian Aid has quantified the significant amount of food wasted or thrown away at Christmas time in the UK and has produced a humorous song about it called, 'Oh What a Waste'. Sung to the tune of 'Twelve Days of Christmas', its lyrics are:

#### Every year at Christmas the UK throws away:

- 12 million carrots
- 11 million raspberries
- 10 million parsnips
- 9 million boats of gravy
- 8 million balls of stuffing
- 70 million mince pies
- 6 million jars of cranberry
- Oooooo... what... a... waste
- 4 million puddings
- So many sprouts
- 2 million turkeys

And they're all at the bottom of the bin.

The suggestion is that £10 from our Christmas shop

donated to help fight famine and hunger will reduce the amount of waste, because it will reduce the amount of overbuying we do.

In stark contrast, earlier this year, famine was declared in parts of South Sudan: the first time it was declared anywhere in six years. More than three years of conflict had displaced nearly 4 million people, disrupting harvests and leading to devastating food shortages.

Although the famine was averted, the crisis in South Sudan has reached unprecedented levels – nearly 6 million people are facing severe food insecurity. If left untreated, acute malnutrition – the most extreme form of food crisis – can lead to death.

Aluel, pictured above, used to run a small business selling tea and bread at her local market, which provided enough money to feed her family. As the situation in South Sudan deteriorated, inflation rose to 800%, meaning her earnings could no longer buy enough food to put on the table.

Christian Aid partner organisation SPEDP (Support for Peace and Education and Development Programme) is providing cash vouchers to people, like Aluel, struggling with acute malnutrition in South Sudan, so they can buy essential food in local markets to help their families recover.