There is no end of resources to help parishes welcome people to church this Christmas. The www.achristmasnearyou.org website is now live. So thanks to all those who have uploaded several thousand Christmas services, people all over the 1100 square miles of St Albans Diocese will be able to find a Christmas Service near them. They will even be able to use a smartphone to geo-locate the nearest service to them, wherever they are. Also live from 1 December is the #JoyToTheWorld hashtag for social media. Churches and individuals can use this hashtag: churches to share photos and videos of their Christmas celebrations and individuals could talk, tweet and share about the services they have attended and maybe even mention their moment of Christmas joy! Tell everyone! FIND, PREPARE and SHARE at www.joytotheworld.org.uk where you will also find free RESOURCES to advertise #JoyToTheWorld.

Growing Attendances
Christmas sees growing church attendances with over 2.5 million people nationally and 97,900 in the diocese coming to a church service (that’s almost 4x the average Sunday all-age attendance during the year). Comparable figures for 2010 are 2.32 million and 87,800. In St Albans Diocese there has been some variation in the figures, with 2011 and 2012 seeing over 96,000 going to church, but a big fall to 90,000 the following year.

Undoubtedly, though, Christmas is the time when our churches see the biggest attendances. In addition to people coming to experience the wonder and joy of Christmas Eve or Christmas Day, a further five million people across the nation attended special services in Advent, for church congregations and churches’ local communities or for civic organisations and schools. That’s something to celebrate as well as it leaving us wondering how to connect with them enough to welcome them back.

Four videos - four moments of Christmas Joy

The first of four videos for Advent on the theme of Christmas joy has appeared. It features the Revd Rose Hudson-Willkin, Chaplain to the Speaker of the House of Commons, visiting her former church in Dalston, London and sharing her moment of Christmas joy. You’ll have to watch, we won’t spoil it!

Happy Christmas.
Joy to the world! The Lord is come; Let earth receive her king!

On the face of it there were few reasons for joy that first Christmas as Israel was under foreign occupation. The mighty Roman Empire suppressed any opposition to its rule with brute force. Different groups in society responded in different ways. The Zealots thought the best solution was a military uprising, although they knew that the likely result would be another mass slaughter. The Essenes, who were a bit like a group of monks, decided to retreat from society and live an austere life in the desert. The two largest religious groups within Israel - the Pharisees and the Sadducees - decided to compromise and work with the Romans. This consolidated their power and guaranteed their role in society.

However, most of the ordinary people, such as the shepherds working up in the hills above Bethlehem, kept their heads down and got on with their lives. Their concern was simply getting enough food and staying warm in order to get through the winter. Yet it was to these working men that the angels appeared. They came with a striking message: "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David a Saviour has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord".

These words are so familiar that they don't seem strange or even striking to us. Yet to the shepherds these words would not only have been astonishing, they were also dangerous, as they were the very names ascribed to the Roman Emperor, Augustus. This is how the Priene inscription, dated around the year 9 BC, described him:

'Since Providence ... has set in most perfect order by giving us Augustus, whom she filled with virtue ... sending him as a saviour, both for us and for our descendants, that he might end war and arrange all things... and since the birthday of the god Augustus was the beginning of the good tidings for the world that came by reason of him...' Augustus is fêted as the 'son of God' and as a 'saviour'. When his victories were proclaimed they were 'good news' or, in the Greek, 'euangelion', because he was the one who brought peace, the Pax Romana. These are very same four words or phrases which are used by the angels - not to describe Augustus but Jesus. Everything is turned upside down. Much to everyone's astonishment it is not the Emperor Augustus who is the real son of God, the saviour who brings good news of peace – no, it is Jesus. No wonder it was a message of joy for the shepherds. And it is still a message of joy for us today. It assures us that whatever happens in the world, even though empires may rise and fall, God has revealed his purposes for our world and invites us to work with him, the Prince of Peace.

Joy to the world! The Lord is come; Let earth receive her king!

bishop@stalbans.anglican.org

Three New Canons!

(L to R)
Canon Mike Pilavachi,
The Venerable Janet Mackenzie,
The Bishop of St Albans and
Canon Jane Hatton.
From Sad to Glad in Hemel Shopping Centre

A giant nativity scene with cut-outs so you can have your photo taken as an angel or a Shepherd, a puppet theatre and several clergy from Hemel Deanery appeared in Hemel Hempstead’s Marlowes Shopping Centre one afternoon. Their purpose: to Live God’s Love. It was the last of the Living God’s Love deanery events before Christmas.

Working together, the parishes set up an event sharing the Christmas story with shoppers - of all ages. At regular intervals children and adults also watched enthralled as church members, hidden behind a screen, acted out the Christmas story with puppets, using the Bible Society story ‘from sad to glad’. Passers-by were intrigued and at least one little boy dragged his mum back to watch it again! Leaflets were handed out telling passers-by about the Christmas services in the Hemel churches, and the children went away with ‘sad to glad’ stickers and the story books. The number of passers-by was a little lower than hoped for, but everyone agreed that it had been worth the effort.

Many children and a few adults had their photo taken as an angel, a wise man, a shepherd – or maybe a cow or sheep! Even Bishop Richard was persuaded to have a go! Bishop Richard said afterwards that the event was “an important statement about getting out beyond the church.”

It took a bit of imagination, and for some not a little bit of courage to stand there and talk to strangers, but it put a smile on people’s faces. A great testimony to the power of working together, sharing gifts and encouraging one another! So now for the next time – Easter?

Some of the photos are in the Goldmine – have a look on the diocesan website to see more! And why not add your own photos from what your parish is doing? Mission Action Plans are already being uploaded with photos attached: have you any photos you could attach when you upload your next MAP? But there’s no need to wait until then – upload them any time! The photo Goldmine and the Mission Action Plans are all searchable: together we can work together, share ideas and encourage one another.

And on the subject of working together, thank you to those who have uploaded their MAPs – and our sincere apologies to those who have encountered difficulties with the new system and thank you for your patience. We are asking that MAPs are now not sent in by attachment, but are uploaded direct, and are working hard to iron out the final glitches, but please continue to let Carol on 01727 818148 or map@stalbans.anglican.org know if there are problems. We will do our best to help. Please also note that the Revd Jeanette Gosney is now the point of contact for support with your MAP, pdo@stalbans.anglican.org
Affirming the ministry of women clergy: new team announced

Following the retirement of the Revd Jenny Hill earlier in the year, Bishop Alan has announced the appointment of a new team to support and encourage all ordained women in the diocese. Revd Jeanette Gosney (Parish Development Officer - top photo) is also to be the new Dean of Women’s Ministry (DWM). She will be working with a team of archdeaconry deanery advisers: (Photos shown in order) The Revd Lucy Davis (Bedford), the Revd Kate Peacock (Hertford) and the Revd Dr Jane Mainwaring (St Albans). Jeanette said: “It is a privilege and a responsibility to be asked to be an advocate for women clergy in the diocese. I am honoured and challenged. Our hope as a team is that we can continue to ensure the inclusion of ordained women at every level of Church life. With a team we will be better able to know the women clergy in our archdeaconries and be more available to help them to flourish in their ministries.”

The team will continue to work with the larger diocesan Transformations Group which over the past few years, has been working to incorporate the national Transformations Agenda into the life of this diocese. So far it has produced a language guide for parishes to use when writing parish profiles and job adverts. It aims to attract more women to apply, thus widening the number of applicants, something which should encourage parishes in vacancy! The group has also put on several training events, for example offering the opportunity for women clergy to think about how they prepare for moving on in ministry, and how to respond constructively when others appear to put them down. There is another event planned for next summer looking at “Leadership and authority: does gender make a difference?”

Thinking of how we can encourage younger women clergy, we are rejoicing that Bishop’s Staff have also recently agreed to improve the maternity package for women clergy. Clergy on maternity leave will now receive nine months on a full stipend, putting us in line with the majority of other dioceses.

Along with many others, the Transformations Group rejoiced at the Church of England decision to consecrate women as bishops last year and more locally the recent appointment of Archdeacon Janet as Archdeacon of Hertford. Although we have a number of female Rural Deans, there has been some concern across the diocese at the lack of women in more senior positions such as incumbents of larger churches or residentiary canons. Looking to the future, Jeanette is hopeful that there will be more opportunities that enable women to fulfil their calling and to serve in positions of greater responsibility. The group will be monitoring progress closely!

Where is God and his Church on your Christmas List?

As we continue our journey of faith, Living God’s Love, with its values, generosity, joy, imagination and courage, the Mission Resourcing team is inviting us to revisit the stewardship programme ‘Giving for Life: Continuing the Journey’ as we consider ‘generosity’.

Parishes can review their approach to issues of stewardship and generosity, within the context of discipleship. A survey of more than 1100 parishes who have run ‘Giving for Life,’ makes it clear that most have made real progress in adopting proven good practice over the past few years. PCCs are asked to allocate 20 to 30 minutes of their meeting to evaluate their strategy with stewardship, and assess where they might further adopt Good Practice.

There are two principal resources to help: a 4 page Leaders Guide introducing the item and a 2-sided sheet for PCC Members. There’s also a short video to introduce this www.parishresources.org.uk/givingforlife/ video/ and a PowerPoint presentation to support. Parishes which have enrolled in the Parish Giving Scheme are equally encouraged to take part. The number of parishes enrolled in PGS is now 50.
St Albans marks 50 years of Reader Ministry in Ely Cathedral

Readers from St Albans Diocese joined those from Ely, Chelmsford, St Edmundsbury & Ipswich, Norwich and Peterborough Dioceses in Ely Cathedral at the end of October to celebrate this important milestone in their ministry together and with clergy, friends and family. Ely Diocese offered to host a day of talks and workshops as well as a service of celebration which filled their vast, including over 100 Readers and Readers-in-Training from St Albans, the largest contingent present.

Richard Osborn, Reader in Potters Bar and Barnet Deanery Lay Chair, and Canon Margaret Tinsley, Reader in St Albans and Deanery Readers Adviser, were on the organising committee. Richard Osborn reflection on the event is: “It was good to work with colleagues from across our region in planning this great celebration of Reader ministry and to meet so many Readers on the day. We came away encouraged and enthused, having enjoyed workshops in the morning and then an uplifting act of worship in the magnificent setting of Ely Cathedral in the afternoon. Let’s hope we can organise another joint event for our dioceses in the not too distant future.”

The ministry of Readers has changed quite a bit over a century and a half. Lauryn Awbrey, Diocesan Readers’ Ministry Officer said: “The traditional rubric is ‘preach, teach and lead worship’ - but Readers now do so much more! They deliver lots of pastoral care in nursing homes, hospitals and chaplaincies. They have involvement in schools with Assemblies and projects at Easter and Christmas. In the parish, they lead funerals (and make associated bereavement visits).”

She continues: “Reader ministry as it is today offers a broad and variable ministry which can take Readers well out of the parish and into the community: an opportunity to reflect the depth as well as the breadth of Christ’s presence in our world, reflecting Christ to the world and the world to the Church.”

John Griffiths, Reader at St Cuthbert’s, Rye Park also played a part in the day, creating a timeline of Reader Ministry which he and Richard Osborn read out during the service. John also produced a video about Reader Ministry in which those in training, those already licensed and some who teach and train Readers give a personal view of what Reader Ministry means to them. You can see it at: https://youtu.be/X92rc6HT-L8
St Cuthbert's, Hoddesdon, celebrated Harvest recently using the Bishops Harvest Appeal as the basis for their service. During this service, there was an opportunity for St Cuthbert’s congregation to respond to the sermon by writing raindrop prayers and these were collected up by the children and used as part of an art installation on the theme of water. At the end of the service whilst everyone was preparing and waiting for the Harvest lunch a group of the church’s creative members put together the installation (see above).

The Revd Alison Jackson, Curate at St Cuthbert’s said: “We used the cross as the basis for our cloud and invisible thread for the raindrops and scraps of material from the sewing group and jewels from our last JAM club (after school club) activity session. I think the result is really special.” See www.harvestappeal.org

Now in its second year, “The Marsh Awards for Innovative Projects” is a competition to find those Christian congregations running the most innovative community activities in a church building made possible through the installation of new facilities such as meeting spaces, kitchens, toilets or improved access. Run with the support of the Marsh Christian Trust, the Awards are designed to show the positive impact that installing new facilities has on churches and local communities and on harnessing the energy and enthusiasm of volunteers.

The awards are open to any Christian congregation in the UK which is a member of Churches Together in Britain and Ireland, and which has seen the installation of new facilities between 2012 and 2016. Nominations close on 13 January 2017. Judges will meet in March 2017 to shortlist entries. The winners will be announced on 18 May 2017 at the Churches Trust Forum annual conference in Manchester.

Key criteria the judges will be looking for:
• Impact – the level of demonstrable social benefit.
• Best practice in management – the level of planning, organization, effort and coordination within the means and circumstances of the project organisers.
• Imagination – the origin of the idea and reasons for the project.
• Need – how deprived or marginalised communities are served by the project.

Any organisation working to help places of worship, such as a local churches trust, can nominate a community project at a church, chapel or meeting house. Please let the church know that they have been nominated. The church will then receive a questionnaire to find out more about how their activity meets the needs of their local community, and for photographs of their project. See: www.nationalchurchestrust.org/how-we-help/marshawards
Clergy Appointments

Clare Baynes, Associate Minister (SSM) at St Stephen’s Church, St Albans is stepping down. She remains as SIM Coordinator and holds PtO.

Simon Chapman presently Chaplain at Aldenham School is to become Chaplain at Clifton College, Bristol.

Debbie Hore, presently Self-Supporting Minister at St Paul’s Church, Marylebone in the diocese of London, is to become Associate Minister (House-for-duty, Part-time) in the benefice of Sawbridgeworth.

The Venerable Dr Trevor Pryce Jones, previously Archdeacon of Hertford, has been appointed Archdeacon Emeritus in Exeter Diocese.

Catherine Pullinger, presently Priest-in-Charge in the benefice of Woodside, Luton, is to become Incumbent of the same.

Nicholas Walsh, presently Assistant Curate-in-training, is to become Team Vicar of St Luke’s Church in Catford (Southend) & Downham Team Ministry in Southwark Diocese.

Kelvin Woolmer, presently Team Vicar in Holy Cross Team Ministry, Chelmsford Diocese, is to become Priest Missioner in the benefice of St Peter de Merton with St Cuthbert, Bedford.

Diocesan Appointments

Karen Turner, Priest-in-charge in the benefice of South Mymms & Ridge has also been appointed Chair of the Caribbean Links Group.

Jenny Fennell has been appointed Rural Dean of Welwyn Hatfield and continues as Vicar in the benefice if Welwyn Garden City.

Mrs Christine Grew has been appointed Bishop’s Visitor.

Canon Richard Leslie has been appointed Diocesan Widow’s Officer for St Albans Archdeaconry.

He continues as Canon Emeritus - retired with PtO.

HOST

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 or call 020 7739 6292.

Silence study material coming soon

Damaris Media will be providing free official resources for churches based on Silence (in UK cinemas 1st January), the latest film from Martin Scorsese. Based on the classic novel by Shusaku Endo, this epic drama tells the story of two devout and reverent young Jesuit priests, Father Rodrigues (Andrew Garfield) and Father Garrpe (Adam Driver). In the early 17th century they risk violence and persecution as they journey to Japan in search of their mentor, Father Ferreira (Liam Neeson), who travelled to Japan many years before and has now gone missing. Upon arrival in Japan, the two young priests discover a country in which Catholicism has been banned and where the new government is systematically eradicating any followers of the Christian faith; circumstances which test their beliefs to the limit as they search for the mysterious Father Ferreira. For further information about discussion and reflection guides visit: www.silence.damarismedia.com

The Revd Kylie Ann Hodgins is pictured with Bishop Alan on the day of her institution at St Luke’s Church, Bricket Wood.
**EVENT LISTINGS**

**December 2016**

Email your events to: comms@stalbans.anglican.org

The Diocese of St Albans in Bedfordshire, Hertfordshire, Luton & Barnet

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**Concerts & Drama**

**St Swithun’s Church, Sandy**

Christmas Concert with Stotfold Salvation Army and other local groups on **Wednesday 7th December** at 7pm. Admission £4 in aid of Leprosy Mission, for more information contact Colin on 01767 682032.

**St Albans Cathedral**

Carols on the Hour, **Saturday, 17th December** from 11.00am-4pm. Each carol service lasts just 30 minutes - enough time to sing some uplifting carols with the Cathedral choirs, and enjoy a taste of Christmas. No tickets required.

**St Owen’s Church, Brompton MK43 8LL**

“Beguiled by Betjeman” A concert with Sir John Betjeman’s poetry mostly in musical settings, featuring 4 singers, narrator and accompanist on **Saturday 7th January** at 3pm. Adults £8 U16 £3. Tickets from 01234 826545 (am) or 01234 826551 (eve).

**All Saints Church, Queens Road, Hertford SG13 8AE**

The Winter/Spring season of Soundbites commences on **January 11th** with the Courtyard Quartet, with weekly concerts until end March. Soup, baked potatoes, rolls etc from 12-15 Concert at 1pm. Full details at www.all saints hertford.org/concerts.php

**St Peter’s Church, Benington**

Snowdrop Recitals 2017: A series of concerts from 2.30 to 3.15pm on the following dates: **Feb 12th** - Gamay Wind Ensemble; **Feb 19th** - Ukulele Orchestra; **Feb 26th** - Six on Sax; **Mar 5th** - Garden City Singers. Free admission with retiring collection in aid of church. Lunches & Teas served in Parish Hall. Lordship Gardens open.

**Open Days & Festivals**

**St Paul’s Church, Bedford**


Tickets at www.bedfordhospitalcharity.org.uk/southamericaconcert or 01234 340163 admin@stpaulschurchbedford.org.uk.

**St Mary’s Church, Ashwell**

Christmas Fair will take place in Church from 9.30am – 2.30pm. on **Saturday, 3rd December**. Stalls will include Arts and Crafts, Cakes and Cards, Presents and Prizes. The Choir will sing carols and refreshments will be available. Winter Wonderland at the U.R.C. from 10.00am – 1.00pm and Village Museum open.

**St Swithun’s Church, Sandy**

Christmas Tree Festival on **Saturday 3rd (12noon - 8pm) and Sunday 4th December** (12noon-6pm) Dozens of spectacular trees decorated by the community. Refreshments both afternoons. St Swithuns Singers perform at 2-3pm on Saturday.

**St Ippolyts Church**

Crib Festival. **Saturday 3rd to Sunday 4th December**. Huge range of wonderful cribs of all ages and sizes. Entry is £2.50, children are free. Tea/coffee and delicious cakes are available. For details contact Barbara.thomas@live.co.uk 01462 421647.

**All Saints Church, Houghton Conquest**

Christmas Tree Festival on **Friday 9th, December** (6pm-8.30pm) **Saturday 10th (10-4pm)** with 9 Lessons & Carols at 6.30pm and **Sunday 11th (11-4pm)**. Admittance Free.

**Holy Saviour Church, Hitchin, SG5 1QG**

Christmas Tree Festival **Friday 9th December** Preview & Concert 6.30pm-9pm (concert 7.45). Seasonal music performed by Holy Saviour Church Choir and The Radcliffe Singers. Tickets £12 (inc mulled wine & refreshments) from 01462 712212 toryevans@greatgreenplus.com. Tree Festival continues **Saturday 10th & Sunday 11th 12noon - 6pm**. Admission £4. Live music and Festival Cafe serving refreshments.

**All Saints’ Leavesden, WD25 0LU**

Christmas Tree Festival on Saturday 13th - **Saturday 17th December** 10 til late. 30 Trees sponsored and decorated by schools, community organisations and businesses celebrating the theme of Living God's Love. Carols around the Christmas Tree, music and poetry recitals - visit www.allsaintslife.com for full programme. Refreshments served in parish centre.

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**Talks & Courses**

**Equipping God’s People**

**Mission Action Planning Workshops start again 25th January 9.30am-1pm**

Workshop covers:

- Exploring vision for mission
- Identifying mission opportunities & community engagement;
- Effective action & progress monitoring.

See new year MAP dates in bundle notices for all the venues, or visit website.

Contact: Kathryn McNamara pdadmin@stalbans.anglican.org 01727 818151

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**Miscellaneous**

**CHARITY CHRISTMAS PUZZLE**

This annual Puzzle, set by Gordon Gray, Reader at Eaton Bray with Edlesborough, is rated by participants as one of the most enjoyable (and devious) they have tackled and, with a theme designed to help completion, it will appeal to people who enjoy doing word puzzles. Puzzlers have plenty of time to find the answers and Puzzles should be returned, with a donation, by 29th January.

Four highest scorers will each receive a £30 prize. Everyone who enters will qualify for one of five £10 prizes.

Copies of the Puzzle can be accessed from the web at: www.christmaspuzzle.co.uk

You can register early to receive a copy on the issue date of 8 December. Over £63,000 raised for charity so far with £5,900 donated last year. This year’s puzzle will support five nominated charities.