With a real mixture of urban and rural areas, St Albans Diocese has its share of areas where broadband speeds are very poor, harming the community and reinforcing the effects of rural poverty with yet another challenge – sometimes described as the digital divide.

St Mary Magdalene’s Church, Dunton, Bedfordshire is one of several churches across the country, but the first in St Albans Diocese, to help redress this through providing its spire to allow high-speed WiFi access for the local community. The height of the spire and the location of the church at the heart of the community make this very effective.

A local resident (whose wife happens to attend St Mary’s) pursued the project with the church after the local community voiced their objections to the placing of a WiFi mast in the village playground. Dunton residents can now get good broadband speeds up to 25 or 30 Mbits across the whole village from the eight aerials installed on the tower, barely visible in the picture above. They distribute the broadband signal beamed wirelessly from the local leisure centre in Biggleswade, a couple of miles away, to small dishes installed on houses in the village which allow the WiFi signal to be received. A relay from the link will allow residents of Millow, a closely neighbouring village, to enjoy the same benefits.

The PCC was very open to the project, seeing it as part of their mission to help the local community. They sought and obtained the faculty required for the project.

The successful project has led to a ‘Telecomms Guidance’ note being made available by our diocese at: www.stalbans.anglican.org/finance/dac-advice-leaflets/ which should help other parishes interested in pursuing similar projects.

It is thought that there are as almost two-thirds of the Church of England’s 16,000 parish churches which are located in rural areas of which some will have the potential for similar projects, emphasising just how central churches still are to community life.
To be a Pilgrim...

Sometimes young people in traditional societies go away from their community for a while in order to progress from being children to adults. While away, the young people form an intense community. They spend lots of time thinking about their society’s story and values. When the young people come back, their return helps the whole community think afresh about its life together. Their experience away strengthens everyone. Their energy helps the whole body think about its long-term health and future.

I wonder whether something like this happens when we go away on pilgrimage. Except that pilgrimage isn’t just for the young! When we travel with others we get to know them well. We form an intense community. Pilgrimages are journeys with a purpose. So when we go on them we think a lot about our story and values. We worship and pray together. And when we get home, we arrive back with a sense of energy and excitement. People talk of pilgrimages bringing their faith to life. Returners want to love and serve God and others in ways they haven’t before. And hopefully, some of this is ‘caught’ even by those who haven’t been on the journey. Pilgrimage benefits everyone.

This is why in our new phase of ‘Living God’s Love’, one of the ways we’re asking people to ‘go deeper into God’ is by ‘encouraging pilgrimage and time away’. This seems particularly right for a Diocese founded on pilgrimage; the Abbey exists because people wanted to come to the shrine of Alban. And we’re a Diocese that continues to reinvent pilgrimage; each summer thousands of young people go to the events of ‘Soul Survivor’.

So why not think about taking part in a pilgrimage in 2017? There’s plenty of opportunity. From walking to St Albans Abbey on Easter Monday to joining the Alban Pilgrimage on Saturday 24th June. For young people there is the Diocesan Youth Pilgrimage to Taizé (22nd-31st July), the Walsingham Youth Pilgrimage (7th-11th August) or one of the Soul Survivor events taking place around the country.

For the whole family there’s New Wine, Greenbelt (25th-28th August) or the Walsingham National Pilgrimage (29th May). For the more adventurous there are pilgrimages to the Holy Land, the Camino de Santiago or in the footsteps of St Paul (see www.stalbanspilgrimages.org.uk)

If none of these are to your taste, why not organise your own journey that’s right for you?

Why not join with others who down the centuries have laughed, eaten, walked, prayed and grown together as they have travelled on pilgrimage – and changed the world on their return?

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Green Communion on 5th February can help mark Eco Church’s first anniversary

A year ago, St Paul’s Cathedral was turned green for the launch of Eco Church, the award scheme for churches wanting to demonstrate that the gospel is good news for God’s Church. A Rocha, who run the scheme, are asking churches to hold a Green Communion on 5th February as part of their worship.

Many churches have signed up and started their journey towards an Eco Church award. If you are interested in encouraging your church to think about living more sustainably but don’t know where to begin, Eco Church offers a very good starting point. If your church has signed up, it would help the Environment Officer to know:

environment@stalbans.anglican.org. A Rocha, the worldwide environmental ministry behind Eco Church with Tearfund, Christian Aid, the Church of England and the Methodist Church, has put resources on their website to help with the Green Communion:

http://ecochurch.arocha.org.uk/introducing-green-communion/

Environmental damage affects the world’s poorest communities most. Care for the environment is a mark of generously Living God’s Love and ‘treading lightly on the earth’ is one of the Anglican Communion’s five marks of mission.

Three cheers for an excellent result

Good news for the beginning of the year from David Nye, DBF Chair

“Very many congratulations to the huge majority of parishes who have paid all or almost all of the parish share request for 2016. Collectively, you have paid over 95% of the amount requested and that is the highest percentage since 2003. A special word of appreciation goes to the deaneries of St Albans, Rickmansworth and Welwyn Hatfield where 100% was paid by all parishes; and several others were very close. You generous contributions, and many people do give sacrificially, enable the work of teaching and preaching the gospel to be sustained in all parishes of the diocese.

If at all possible, please do continue to pay the Parish share monthly because that means there is sufficient cash each month to meet stipends, salaries and other expenses. And one further plea. We, and indeed the National church, do rely on returns of parish Mission Statistics because these are used in planning for the future in all sorts of ways. Those returns for 2016 were due in by 27 January 2017: please do make sure those for your parish have been submitted.

As always, please do ask if you would like someone to come and talk to your PCC or deanery about money matters and ways in which the Board of Finance may be able to help.”
Christmas attendances have shown good growth (11.5%) over the five years from 2010-2015, (even with some anomalous years where attendances fell) reaching 97,900 in 2015. Figures from 2016 will not be available just yet, but churches clearly make the most of the opportunities of the season right through Advent and Christmas. Here, on this and the facing page, are two examples.

For the four weeks of Advent, St Cuthbert’s Rye Park explored the diocesan Living God’s Love prayer with advent characters representing ‘generosity and joy, imagination and courage’ Rather ingeniously, their Vicar, the Revd Jonathan Evans, connected Imagination with the prophet Isaiah, Courage with John the Baptist, Joy with Mary, and Generosity with Joseph. Each week, a sermon was based on these characters.

Jonathan borrowed full-sized mannequin figures from St Marys Cheshunt - who just happened to have them.

Reader, John Griffiths, responded to the Vicar’s call for suggestions on how to dress the figures, commenting: “It's the first time I have ever received a round robin asking if anyone in the parish has a djellebah. Actually several were offered! And Ruth Cordell a member of the congregation created an artwork for each week - each based on a light box which was illuminated from behind. Putting all of this together, they had four stations around the church representing the values from the diocesan prayer.

Diocesan Lent Course 2017

Our three bishops, the Dean and The Director of Ministry have put together a Lent course based on the Living God’s Love values, generosity, joy, imagination and courage. In their introduction, the authors say: “As we pray the Living God’s Love prayer, we ask that the Holy Spirit would inspire us – both as individuals and as God’s Church in Hertfordshire and Bedfordshire – with generosity, joy, imagination and courage. But what does that look like? How might our lives demonstrate these qualities? And how do these qualities reflect Christian Scripture and tradition? This accessible course considers these questions. It can be used either by individuals or small groups, during Lent or at any time of year.”

www.stalbans.anglican.org/faith/lent-course-2017/
Eighteen schools in and around Stevenage responded to an invitation from Bridge Builders Christian Trust to participate in The Christmas Journey, a 90 minute church-based event for Year 2 children to hear the Christmas Story and explore its significance for Christians today. Part of the larger ExploRE project, run annually, and free to schools, The Christmas Journey partners Bridge Builders with local churches of any Christian denomination and primary schools. Three churches hosted the 2016 Christmas Journey, bringing a total of 886 children to hear about Advent and the Christmas Story. The Christmas Journey Team took local primary school children back in time to meet the main characters of the first Christmas story. In small groups the children heard the story from each character’s perspective and asked them questions. They then completed a craft activity which was attached to their ‘passport’. The children took these passports home. Stephen McPartland, MP for Stevenage, was among local dignitaries visiting The Christmas Journey. He said, “It is important we remember the real story of Christmas and it is amazing to watch the Bridge Builders volunteers bring it to life. The children love the activities and the volunteers do an amazing job with such commitment.” Other visiting dignitaries included Bridge Builders Patron, Councillor Sharon Taylor OBE, the High Sheriff of Hertfordshire and his wife, Mr Stelios and Mrs Susie Stefanou and the Mayor of Stevenage, Cllr John Lloyd and Mrs Lloyd. The passion and aim of the ExploRE project is to inspire local church leaders and their congregations to connect more effectively with the primary schools in their neighbourhood and for primary school staff to recognise and utilise the wealth of resources the church can offer to support their teaching of Christianity within the RE curriculum and in corporate acts of worship. Among feedback comments from school staff who brought their pupils along are these: “Excellent. I highly recommend this experience to all schools!” “Thank you – very understanding of children with additional needs. Such a lovely approach. Well done!” “Super activities and people – all dealt with the children beautifully. All children were able to access the learning.” “Another fantastic Christmas Journey. The children love it.” “Our Children know the Christmas Story very well but meeting the characters really brought it to life! Thank you.” For further details on The Christmas Journey, the ExploRE project and the work of Bridge Builders Christian Trust, please visit: www.bridgebuilderstrust.org.uk

Live the Challenge, Lent 2017

A journey through the gospel of Luke - with a daily Bible verse, reflection and response. The focus each day will be on making the gospel of Christ known in today’s world and praying that people may come to know him. We encourage you to participate in this Lent Challenge, which will also give great preparation for our engagement with the global prayer initiative later this year (in May/June) Thy Kingdom Come.

Sign up at: www.stalbans.anglican.org/faith/live-the-challenge/
Archbishops call for unity in Reformation’s 500th anniversary year, at start of week of prayer

As this edition of SeeRound Online is published at the end of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity 2017, we are publishing the Archbishops of Canterbury and York’s joint statement on the 500th anniversary of the Reformation, released to coincide with the Week, in which they “call on all Christians to seek to be renewed and united in the truth of the Gospel.”

"This year, churches around the world will be marking the great significance of the 500th anniversary of the beginning of the Reformation in Europe, dated from Martin Luther's 95 Theses protesting against the practice of indulgences, on 31 October 1517 at Wittenberg. The Church of England will be participating in various ways, including sharing in events with Protestant church partners from Continental Europe. The Reformation was a process of both renewal and division amongst Christians in Europe. In this Reformation Anniversary year, many Christians will want to give thanks for the great blessings they have received to which the Reformation directly contributed. Amongst much else these would include clear proclamation of the gospel of grace, the availability of the Bible to all in their own language and the recognition of the calling of lay people to serve God in the world and in the church. Many will also remember the lasting damage done five centuries ago to the unity of the Church, in defiance of the clear command of Jesus Christ to unity in love. Those turbulent years saw Christian people pitted against each other, such that many suffered persecution and even death at the hands of others claiming to know the same Lord. A legacy of mistrust and competition would then accompany the astonishing global spread of Christianity in the centuries that followed. All this leaves us much to ponder.

Remembering the Reformation should bring us back to what the Reformers wanted to put at the centre of every person's life, which is a simple trust in Jesus Christ. This year is a time to renew our faith in Christ and in Him alone. With this confidence we shall then be ready to ask hard questions about those things in our lives and the life of our churches that get in the way of sharing and celebrating faith in Him. Remembering the Reformation should also lead us to repent of our part in perpetuating divisions. Such repentance needs to be linked to action aimed at reaching out to other churches and strengthening relationships with them. This anniversary year will provide many opportunities to do just that, beginning with this Week of Prayer for Christian Unity. We therefore call on all Christians to seek to be renewed and united in the truth of the gospel of Christ through our participation in the Reformation Anniversary, to repent of divisions, and, held together in Him, to be a blessing to the world in obedience to Jesus Christ."

Clergy Appointments

Canon Michael Burns, presently Vicar in the benefice of Potters Bar, is to become Priest-in-Charge of Christ Church, West Wimbledon in Southwark Diocese.

Jennie Cappleman, presently holds responsibility for Bolling Hall (Public Preacher Licence, Deanery of Sharnbrook) is retiring with PtO.

Joy Cousans, presently Priest-in-Charge in the benefice of High Hoyland, Scissett and Clayton West, Leeds diocese, is to become Vicar in the benefice of Eaton Bray with Edlesborough.

Peter Crumpler, presently Assistant Curate in Training (SSM) in the benefice of Sandridge, will become Associate Minister (SSM) of the same.

Sally Goodson, presently Assistant Curate in the United Benefice of St Bartholomew Hyde & St Lawrence w. St Swithun-upon-Kingsgate in Winchester Diocese, is to become Associate Vicar (with special responsibility for Kinsbourne Green, St Mary) Harpenden.

Dr Catherine (Kate) Sharples presently Assistant Curate in Training in the benefice of St Peter, Broadwater in Stevenage, is to become Vicar of the same.

Canon John Williams, presently Team Rector in Cheshunt Team Ministry, is to become Team Rector in Hemel Hempstead Team Ministry.

Diocesan Appointments

Charles Hudson has been appointed Rural Dean of Cheshunt and continues as Rector for Broxbourne with Wormley.

Obituaries

It is with sadness that we announce the deaths of Alexander (Alex) Twells, Reader with PtO from Chorleywood, and Philip Halsey, Reader Emeritus from Radlett.

Schoolreaders

improving literacy • increasing life chances

VOLUNTEERS NEEDED TO LISTEN TO CHILDREN READ IN LOCAL PRIMARY SCHOOLS!! Can you spare an hour or two a week to listen to children read in a local primary school? Schoolreaders is looking for more volunteers in Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire to carry out this important role.

Reading time for many children at home and at school is often insufficient and one in four children are now leaving primary school unable to read to the required standard. This can have a lifelong consequence. No qualifications are necessary, just a good command of spoken and written English.

Schoolreaders is flexible and will match your availability to an appropriate, local school. Our volunteers find the scheme incredibly rewarding, knowing that a few hours helping a child learn to read each week can have such a great impact on their life chances.

Please visit the website www.schoolreaders.org to join or call 01234 924111 for further information.

Honours

Janet Bird, Board for Church and Society Vice Chair, has been named in the New Year’s Honours List - she has been awarded the British Empire Medal (BEM) for services to the community in Hertford. Janet has organised ‘Christmas Alone’ for many years - since 1992 - which sees people who are lonely, alone or elderly, enjoy a delicious Christmas Day meal to remember. Upon receiving this news, Janet said, ‘It’s just phenomenal!’

Michael Grant who has served on the PCC of All Saints, Leighton Buzzard, for decades, many as Church Warden, has been appointed Member of the British Empire (MBE). He also served on Billington Parish Council, for several as chairman. The verges on either side of the road through Billington show a mass of daffodils in the Spring, for which Michael is responsible. He is also deeply involved in the U3A. Although now 90 years old he is still fully occupied serving the village.

Howard Guard, DL, Former High Sherriff of Hertfordshire, and Chair of the Cathedral Fabric Committee has been appointed Commander of the British Empire, (CBE).
### Concerts & Drama

**All Saints Church, Queens Road, Hertford, SG13 8AE.** The Winter/Spring season of Soundbites continues with the Courtyard Quartet, **weekly concerts until end March.** Soup, baked potatoes, rolls etc from 12:15 Concert at 1pm. Full details at www.allsaintshertford.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.

**St Michael’s Church, Bishop’s Stortford.** The St Albans Cathedral Choir in concert **Saturday 25 February.** This free concert, supported by the Music Trust, will begin at 7pm and a collection will be in aid of St Michael’s Music Trust, will begin at 7pm and a collection will be in aid of St Michael’s Music Trust.

**St Peter’s Church, Berkhamsted.** Concert by Bridgewater Sinfonia on **Saturday 11th March at 7.30pm.** Programme includes works by Beethoven and Brahms. Tickets £15 in advance, £16 on door U18’s free. Enquiries 01442 873205 or visit www.bridgewater-sinfonia.org.uk.

**St Albans Cathedral.** Join the Music Trust to watch the incredible finals of the sixth Young Musician's Competition in the Cathedral Nave **Sunday 26th February** from 1:30pm. We guarantee a wonderful afternoon of incredibly talented local young people performing. Tickets will be available on the door £5.

**St Andrews Church, Harpenden.** Carillon Chamber Choir will perform Heinrich Schutz’s Matthew Passion in 2 local churches as part of the keeping of Lent. Retiring collections only. Dates: **Sunday 2 April at 6.30 pm in St John’s Church, Harpenden, AL5 1DJ** and **Sunday 9 April at 6.30 pm in St Mary’s Church, Welwyn, AL6 9LX**

**Riding Lights Passion Play.** Performance hosting opportunities for churches from **March 7th to 15th April.** Aimed at audiences aged over 12yrs. Please see leaflet in e-bundle notices or visit www.rltc.org/crosslight or call Beth on 01904 655317 or email beth@rltc.org

### Open Days & Festivals

**All Saints’ Church, Melbourn, SG8 6DX.** Winter Flower Festival on **Saturday 4th & 5th February 10.30am - 5pm.** Warming refreshments will be served throughout the weekend in All Saints’ Community Hall together with a craft stall selling beautiful hand made Valentine and Easter gifts, cards and lots more. Further details Rosemary Gatward 01763 261225 or email Rebecca.Gatward@btinternet.com

**Blunham Church, Beds, MK44 3NQ.** Giant Book Sale - **Saturday 18th February 10.00 to 3.00 pm.** Come to our Browse and Buy a Selection of second hand/nearly new books, Homemade cakes, teas and coffees, homemade soup and a raffle. All proceeds to Blunham Church Fabric Fund.

### Miscellaneous

**Church Urban Fund.** are calling on churches, schools, families, and individuals throughout England to stand up to food poverty – and have some fun in the process. On **Shrove Tuesday, (28th February)** join the Big Pancake Party and raise money so that no one has to go hungry this spring. Visit www.cuf.org.uk/bpp-resources-for-churches for more information.

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### Talks & Courses

**Equipping God’s People.**

**Mission Action Planning Workshops - new dates available.**

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

For course dates and bookings, see: www.stalbans.anglican.org/ministry/find-a-course/ Contact: Kathryn McNamara pdadmin@stalbans.anglican.org 01727 818151

**The Very Revd Dr Jeffrey John.**

is coming to BELIEF to speak on: ‘All generations shall call her blessed’

**Saturday 18th February 10am-1pm at St Andrews Church, Kimbolton Road, Bedford MK40 2PF**

(Refreshments included.)

Cost is £10 per person, payable on the day.

To book please call 01234 330314 or email belief@standrewsbedford.org

**Friends of St Owen’s Church, Bromham.** Behind the Scenes at W&H Peacock, Bedford Auctioneers & Valuers, Newnham Street. **Thursday 23rd February 6.30 for 7.00pm.** Talk, Tour, Light-hearted Quiz & Refreshments. Limited Places – Booking Essential. Tickets £14 from 01234 826551.