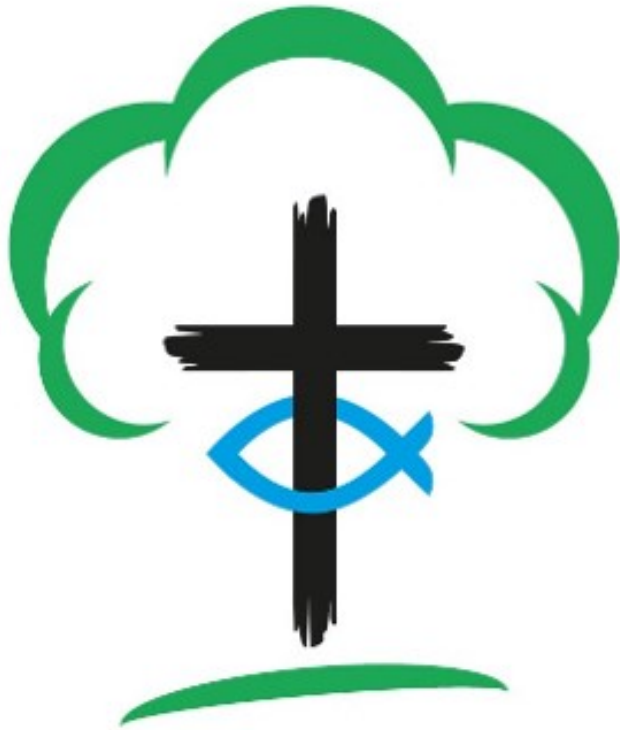


# United Voices!



*St Albans*  
**United  
Reformed  
Church**

**The quarterly magazine of St. Albans United Reformed Church**

**Spring Edition**

**Issue 7—April 2025**

## **From the Editorial Team:**

A big WELCOME to you all to this our 7<sup>th</sup> edition of United Voices. As usual we send our grateful thanks to all who have sent in articles and pictures which make United Voices such an interesting read.

Just a word about New Year resolutions. I am assuming that none were made because we have not received any reports of success or otherwise. I thought about it but then decided that changes in our behaviours can be made at any time in the year, not just New Year.

On a more sombre note, I know that the majority of our readers are aware that our editor, Sue, has been very poorly - resulting in a stay in hospital for ten days, then a month recuperation in a care home. Thankfully she is feeling much better now. This may mean that the publication of this edition might be a little late. An old saying is 'Better late than never'.

There are many celebrations and events coming up over the next few months including holidays so please don't forget to send us a picture and article that we can all share.

So, till then, we wish you a very Happy Easter and all that that brings. Thank you.

Maggie Snyder ([maggiesnyder92@gmail.com](mailto:maggiesnyder92@gmail.com))

Sue Brooks ([squirrel19@btinternet.com](mailto:squirrel19@btinternet.com))

Gill Elliott

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## **Thoughts and ideas wanted!**

**Lots of items are produced by our church to keep us in touch with each other. The Communications sub-committee members are responsible for this in our different ways, and we would love some feedback on how we communicate as a church.**

**Recently, I think the Newsletter received some feedback. But more is always welcome and it would be good to know as well what you think about 'United Voices' and the posters, leaflets, banners, signs and other items that are produced by our committee.**

**Are we clear in what we're saying? Do you find the publications helpful? How can we improve on what we provide?**

**Do you have any ideas for publications or notices? Would you like to provide some for us to see? Have you any experience in this field that you would like to share with us?**

**It's open to everyone to respond to this. All ideas will be gratefully received. Please send them to Anne Goldsmith ([annie\\_lou@hotmail.com](mailto:annie_lou@hotmail.com)) by email in the first instance and she will share them with the team.**

**Sue Brooks**

# Letter from an Elder

– by Helen Griffiths

As I start this letter... I am still buzzing from the remarkable experience of singing Bach's St John Passion (in English!) with Hertfordshire Chorus in St Albans Cathedral. Many say that it is one of their favourite choral works and it's easy to see why. And to top it all, we sang beneath the huge moon which was hanging in the Nave at the time!

It is a dramatic, yet sensitive, setting of the Passion story as related in St John's Gospel. The Gospel narrative is told by The Evangelist, Jesus, Pilate & Peter. The crowd scenes and the frenzied mob was sung by the choir (we were very good at that!) and in operatic style arias, the soloists reflected on the unfolding events.

Bach's incredible music seizes your emotions from the start and the words portray the drama of the events along the journey, leading to Jesus' brutal crucifixion on the cross. This time of Lent is also a journey to the cross and this is well portrayed in these words taken from Kate McIlhagga's poem - 'Lent is not for the faint hearted'

*'Lent is a journey towards the cross,  
a journey of enlightenment:  
from wilderness to feast,  
from desert to oasis.  
It's an attempt to identify with the powerless  
and the suffering in the world.*

*Lent is a journey.  
So that at the end of Lent  
we should expect to find ourselves  
somewhere different from where we started.'*

Life is also a journey from cradle to grave. It may be short or long, dramatic or boring, packed full of incident or empty of meaning, going round in circles or moving straight towards a clear goal. Jesus seems to have been very sure about his journey and his destination. He had the courage to keep moving ahead despite increasing opposition.

We need Jesus to accompany us on our journey. We need, like Simon Peter, to leave our nets, the things that tangle us up in life, and go on a new journey and follow him.

*Journeying God, we need some signposts,  
for it is all too easy to get confused and lose our way.  
We ask for your company along the way,  
for it is all too easy to feel alone and frightened.  
Keep us moving on in our particular journeys  
– through Lent and beyond –  
for the rest of our lives  
Amen.*



# EASTER SERVICES & EVENTS

at ST ALBANS URC



## Palm Sunday

**Sunday 13<sup>th</sup> April 10.30am at Homewood**

led by Rev John Steele



## Easter Fun

**Thursday, 17<sup>th</sup> April (10.30 – 12.00) at Homewood**

Children's Craft Morning



## Maundy Thursday Service

**Thursday, 17<sup>th</sup> April 7pm at Greenwood**

A whole church service (to include a meal) – led by Worship Group

## Good Friday Service

**Friday, 18<sup>th</sup> April 2.00 pm at Homewood**

led by Harry Smith



## Good Friday Walk of Witness

starting from St Alban & St Stephen RC Church at **7.20 pm**, leading to  
Unity at the Cross Service in the Cathedral,  
**8.00pm**, led by **City Church**, organised by **CTSA**

## Prayer Vigil

**Saturday, 19<sup>th</sup> April 2.00 pm at Homewood**

led by Ray Fraser



## Easter Sunday

**Sunday, 20<sup>th</sup> April at Greenwood**

**8.30am** Easter Day Breakfast

**10.30am** Easter Day Holy Communion led by Mike Findley

**Sunday, 20<sup>th</sup> April 10.30am at Homewood**

Easter Day Holy Communion led by Rev John Steele

## StAURC Wild Goose Weekend: October 3<sup>rd</sup>-5<sup>th</sup>



In May 2024 I was fortunate to experience an inspirational week on the Scottish island of Iona led by the Wild Goose Resource Group.

It was not my first time there. I have been visiting Iona all my life, since my grandparents lived and worked in the Abbey as part of the Iona Community.

But this week was a bit different, in that it aimed to stimulate and explore creative ways of communicating biblical passages and concepts in worship. The Abbey guests had come from around the world to re-energise their thinking, which they would then take home to their own churches. I was one of very few non-clergy people staying that week.



If only some more folk from STAURC could have experienced this too, I thought.

When I got home, one of the Elders asked what I thought about having a group from our church go to Iona.

It's a bit of a trek to get to Iona from S.E. England. At least 2 trains, 2 ferries, a bus and a walk! So, the Elders decided instead to invite Iona to come to us, in the form of The Wild Goose Resource Group. Information about the team can be found at the back of both the churches.

The weekend consists of three workshop sessions with the team (and liberally interspersed by refreshments!) which build creative ideas through Bible study, conversation, music making and more, towards the culmination of the Sunday morning service at Home-wood.

**Save the date!**  
**Wild Goose Resource Group**  
are coming to **STAURC**  
in **October**:



**Timings:**  
**HW #1: 7-9pm, Fri 3<sup>rd</sup>**  
**GW #2: 10.30- 12.30 Sat 4<sup>th</sup>**  
**GW Lunch: 12.30 – 1.30**  
**GW #3: 1.30- 3.30pm**  
**HW service: 10.30-11.30, Sun 5<sup>th</sup>**



**An interactive weekend exploring creative and participative ways to worship, led by the Wild Goose Resource Group of the Iona Community - Jane Bentley, Jo Love, Iain McLarty**

Tickets cost £12 for 1 session or £17 for 2 or 3.

Please sign up to come to one or more of the workshop sessions over the weekend of 3<sup>rd</sup>-5<sup>th</sup> October or book tickets via Gill Elliott on [gilldotelliott@googlemail.com](mailto:gilldotelliott@googlemail.com)

We hope that almost everyone will attend at least one of the workshops, preferably all of it!

### Why go?

- It is hoped that this will be a Big Event in the life of our church and help in building relationships across the three former churches.

It will be fun and exciting, and will help spiritually re-energise us during the vacancy.

Fiona Smith

## Let's meet.....Noel Knopp

Noel was born in Belfast but never lived there, being brought up in the family home in Potters Bar. His education had a very traditional Catholic Church background. He attended the local primary school, and he participated in the various after school activities of Sunday School, cubs and scouts. He had lots of adventures when camping and sailing in Scotland at Lochearnhead Scout Station. Many years later he became a Governor of this school. His secondary schooling saw him in Enfield attending a classically themed Jesuit school, where afterschool activities allowed him to join the Naval Cadets. Childhood and schooling were very happy times.

'A' levels took him to Mid Herts College in Welwyn Garden City, where the 'happy times' continued, as it was there that he met Sheila, later to be his wife.



On leaving education Noel decided that he would like to work in the wholesale division of Courtaulds in London. This took him all over Essex selling to various outlets and even to the Channel Isles for a week twice a year. After a couple of years, Noel decided that he wanted something more interesting and fulfilling. Sheila was nursing at The Royal Free Hospital by then so his plan was to be an Operating Assistant. However, someone asked him why he didn't train to be a nurse? So, his long career in nursing and eventually nursing education began. His training, which he found interesting and very rewarding, commenced at Edgware General Hospital. He especially appreciated the time spent interacting with the older patients and helping them, many of whom had experiences of German concentration camps.

His marriage to Sheila took place in 1976 while he was still a student nurse, so they moved from North London to St. Albans. They both felt that they wanted to join a church so decided to start with Trinity URC. Although their initial plan was to attend a few churches to see where they felt that they 'fitted', they liked Trinity and stayed.

In 1979 Noel made the decision to train as a Clinical Psychologist at Hatfield Polytechnic, where he obtained a Degree in Psychology. Unfortunately the world had changed during those 3 years and jobs were no longer available so it was back to nursing and further training at Stevenage where he completed the District Nursing course. As a District Nurse he looked after terminally ill patients, the disabled and young people, again finding the work very satisfying. He was then 'head hunted' to become a Service Training Officer for District Nurses in Dacorum. This change of direction led him to take a post-graduate course in Education and Registration as a Nurse Tutor. Later a political decision was made to merge Nurse training with universities, so Noel took on the role as a Senior Lecturer at Hatfield University. Noel's own education continued. He took a Masters Degree (MSc) and later a Master of Philosophy Degree (MPhil,) both focused on the provision of healthcare in the community. His lecturing finally ended in 2015 when he retired.

Back to Trinity and his contribution, with Sheila, to church life: production of the church magazine, and running the Traidcraft stall. Noel was Chairman of the Trinity Community Project for 18 years and latterly became an Elder.

Noel feels very happy with the merger of our three churches and continues to make contributions when he can. His time outside church life is spent reading, favourites being detective novels and historical books. He continues sailing with his son, making coastal trips on Dinah - an 1887 Thames sailing barge. This includes Barge matches. He also enjoys cooking, favourites being Mediterranean and North African food, and of course, most importantly, spending time with their 5-year-old grandson and 3-year-old granddaughter. Noel finished by saying how proud both he and Sheila were of their children's achievements in their chosen careers. Maggie Snyder

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### Let's meet ..... Diana Devereux

I was born and have lived in St Albans all my life. I was adopted at six weeks old by my amazing parents, Hector and Muriel Stone. Mum, Dad and my brother Christopher and I lived in Salisbury Avenue and I attended Lyndale School from the age of 5 until I was 16. I have many happy memories of growing up in St Albans, playing on the street with my best friend Pat, who I still see regularly, raising chickens in the back garden and being taught by my Auntie Mary to play the piano, as well as attending ballet and Scottish dancing lessons! I had an idyllic childhood. Mum and Dad were active members of Trinity Church all of their lives and so, from as soon as I can remember, attending church, and being part of church life has always been part of who I am. When I was a child the minister was the Rev. Dixon and as a youngster I was a member of Trinity's Junior and Senior church which was led by Samuel Ryder's daughter, Joan Scarfe. I attended weekly alongside Sandra and Gill Ogilvie. At 16 I joined the church's Youth Club led by Brian Fuller and enjoyed taking part in their social events. Over the years we have continued to meet up, including reunions.



I continued to attend as a young adult and began my working career as a Nursery Nurse. My first job was at the Queen Elizabeth II Hospital in Welwyn Garden City in the special care baby unit. I was only 18 years old. I stayed there for a year before getting a job as a Nursery Nurse at Muriel Green Nursery School on Lemsford Road. I worked alongside an amazing team led by the Head Teacher Miss Harrison and I have many happy memories of this time.

On March 10<sup>th</sup>, 1973, I got married to Barry Devereux at Trinity Church. The minister at the time was the Rev John Reardon. Three years later after the arrival of our first child, Charlotte, we were both baptised on the 15<sup>th</sup> May 1976 (Barry's birthday!) Around this time I took the big decision to leave Trinity and join Homewood Road Church. Sadly, at this time Trinity did not have many young families as part of its congregation and no longer had an active Junior Church department. As young parents we wanted our children to grow up with church as part of their lives and saw that Homewood Road could offer this and so we made the move.

Soon we welcomed our second child, Amy, and she was baptised by Alun Hopkins in 1979. The Rev. Henry Starkey came to be our minister and his enthusiasm made Homewood Road a great church for families. We enjoyed lots of family events, including yearly BBQs at the Davies' home. The children became active members of the Junior and Senior church, taking part in yearly Scripture Exams and fun Christmas parties organised and led by Margaret Lorraine and her brilliant team, including Margaret Reed and Mary Lees. As young parents we made many new friends, many of whom are still an important part of my life. In 1980 our family was completed by the arrival of our son Daniel. My top priority has always been my family and I am so lucky to have three devoted children. Charlotte and Amy are both teachers and Daniel is an Area Manager for Lidl. They make me so proud and with the arrival of my gorgeous grandson and granddaughter I am full of love and pride.

I completed my working career at Skyswood School Nursery and set up an Environmental Club, showing the children how to grow plants and nurture the natural world around them. Since I retired in 2010 I have not stood still and now enjoy regular road trips in my little car visiting friends and family all over the country as well as joining various walking, gardening and keep fit groups to keep me busy each day. I like to set myself challenges and even though I am now unable to embark on the Coast to Coast trips I once did on my bike I still aim to visit lots of places and do new things, spurred on by my grandchildren. I am very lucky to have many wonderful friends and I enjoy many coffee and cake dates over the course of the week!

The church will always be a central part of my life and I love to be part of all that is going on. Over the years I have been part of the Junior Church team and enjoyed supporting the young members of our church each week as well as embarking on 20 years as a church elder, supporting many of the church's families and older members. I led and enjoyed being part of the church's hand chime group. This allowed us to entertain many different groups in St Albans, mainly in local nursing homes. Our audiences were usually polite and appreciative of our efforts! We raised nearly £4000 for various charities over the years and had lots of giggles and fun.

I also enjoyed setting up the weekly coffee club for parents attending the Saturday ballet classes in the church hall. With the help of my dear friend Mary Lees the parents were grateful for a warm and friendly place to wait with their younger children whilst the ballet lessons took place. From their weekly donations we raised money for the local Keech Hospice. The church's spiritual and social support have helped me navigate all parts of my life and I am so grateful to be part of such a caring community.





## Eco Church News

Last year Eco Church updated its Survey to reflect the urgency and complexity of the climate and biodiversity crises, designing it to match the scale of action needed. Their aim is to stretch churches further than they did with the old survey yet still provide a framework that's both ambitious and achievable.

You might remember that there are five strands to the Eco Church Survey to cover the key aspects of church life: Worship and Teaching, Buildings and Energy, Land and Nature, Community and Global Engagement and Lifestyle. I am encouraged that many of the questions in the new survey can already be answered positively by us but there are some significant changes that will need to be addressed as we strive for a silver award.

In particular, the first question in each strand asks, "*is the church is committed to the spirit of the strand?*" Although we have an environmental policy which implies we have made those commitments, to answer that question the Green Group will need to be assured that we are, as a group of people, prepared to honour that commitment. So, over the next 5 issues of United Voices I intend to look at each commitment and unpick what they mean to us in practical terms. At some point, probably in a Church Meeting, we will need to formally agree that we can meet each commitment.

We are starting with the Buildings and Energy Strand. The commitment statement for this strand is:

*Our church has recognised the climate and nature crises and the fundamental injustice these represent. We have committed to reducing our carbon footprint year-on-year, in line with our denomination's commitment to net zero*

I am sure news of the increasingly frequent natural disasters, floods, wildfires, storms and droughts, all indicators of our all too rapidly changing climate, have not gone unnoticed by us all. For me a striking example is the floods in Spain last October ([read more here](#)). Likewise, you may be aware of the nature decline right on our doorstep. The recent Herts and Middlesex Wildlife trusts recent State of Nature report concludes that in the last 50 years **1,524** species have been identified as being Hertfordshire Species of Conservation Concern - meaning extinct or threatened in Hertfordshire. Similarly, I am sure we are all aware of the injustice this represents to the global south. If not, perhaps reading Christian Aid's Climate Justice Crib sheet will be helpful [climate-crib-sheet-new-mp.pdf](#)



Perhaps, more important is our commitment to do what we can to redress that injustice by reducing our carbon footprint and do all we can do to work towards the Net Zero Target set by our denomination as soon as we possibly can. It is important that we have a common understanding of what is meant by Net Zero and the implications it has for us as a church. The term net zero applies to a situation where emissions from human activity are in balance with emissions reductions. At net zero, carbon dioxide emissions are still generated, but an equal amount of carbon dioxide is removed from the atmosphere as is released into it, resulting in zero increase in net emissions.

In practical terms for us this means:

Reducing the carbon footprint of church life as far as possible

Offsetting what remains by paying a selected organization a sum of money for them to take actions that will mitigate the carbon emissions we are producing. For this to be in line with our denominations commitment it would start to be paid in 2030 – although there no reason for us not to start sooner.

You will have heard that carbon offset schemes need to be chosen with care. Some are scams, some enable ‘greenwashing’, some are ineffective, some damage biodiversity and/or local communities. The URC’s Net Zero Group and A Rocha recommend [‘Climate Stewards’](#), a good scheme which will not only take up and store atmospheric carbon, but will add benefits such as:

enabling carbon-neutral technologies where they cannot be locally afforded.

helping restore indigenous biodiversity.

supporting local communities

The good news is that we are already well on down that pathway.

The Greenwood Development has resulted in a new hall which is a very sustainable building with an Energy Performance Certificate rating of A+. The Church building refurbishment had many elements to enhance its energy efficiency.

The Recent Energy Audit performed at Homewood has given us a strategy to reduce our energy consumption there too. This will have implications for capital expenditure but will also represent eventual savings as our fuel bills reduce.

However, we need to realise that, although the energy consumed in the use of our buildings is a large part of our carbon footprint, it is not all of it. Every aspect of human activity has some sort of carbon implication, including church life. To reduce our carbon footprint we first need to identify how it is made up. Again, this is where Climate Stewards will be helpful as they provide a free ‘carbon counter’ that we plan to use. Once we have a figure, we can set ourselves targets on reducing our footprint and we will also be able to see the amount of money it would be appropriate for us to pay to offset carbon we are left with. So, this year the green team will be collecting the data and filling in the Climate Stewards Carbon Calculator. We will let you all know the results for 2025, suggestions of carbon cutting measures in 2026, and what the cost would be should we decide to offset.

This may feel uncomfortable and, for some, seem an added burden on already tight budget. Some may say, “the government has reduced its commitment so why shouldn’t we” or “look at China and their huge carbon footprint – what is the point in us making life difficult for ourselves”. My friends, I have to say, if we have committed to follow Christ we have also committed to care for creation. The climate crisis is here, and it is real and already thousands upon thousands have suffered and will suffer in the future. I want to be able to face my maker and say that I have tried my best to protect His creation and I very much want to be part of a church that also does.

Anna Barrett



## News from the Thames North Synod

Our church brought a resolution to Synod concerning its investments. The purpose was to engender debate on the support for the General Assembly Investment Resolutions of 2021 and 2024 arising from the situation in Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories and discussion of any barriers to their implementation. After a lot of discussion, the following was agreed to be put

- A) This Synod desires to support the 2021 and 2024 General Assembly Resolutions on avoidance of investment in companies which facilitate or profit from the occupation of Palestinian territories (Resolutions 32 and 33, 2021) and the 2024 Resolution on avoidance of investment in any Israeli registered companies (Resolution 45, 2024)**
- B) This Synod refers this matter to the Treasurer and Resources Committee to see what measures can be taken to meet the request from General Assembly regarding the investments.**

These resolutions were put and passed by at least a two thirds majority of those voting in person or online.

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## Can YOU help an organist?



The 33rd St Albans International Organ Festival will take place in July this year. 20 young organists from all over the world take part in the Interpretation and Improvisation Competitions and stay in local households.

Supporting a competitor can be a fun and rewarding experience and in grateful thanks the IOF Board offers benefits including complimentary tickets and invitations to receptions. If you're able to offer B&B for any length of time between 2nd-20th July, the IOF Office would love to hear from you. Please contact the Administrator, Ophelia Amar, on 01727 844765 or email: [administrator@organfestival.com](mailto:administrator@organfestival.com) . If you would like to know anything more before doing so, please have a word with Lesley King.



The 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary of VE Day is on May 8<sup>th</sup> this year. It marks the end of World War II in Europe and honours the service and sacrifice of those who fought in the war, as well as those who supported them from home.

The anniversary will be celebrated around the country. At 9am, Town Criers will say the VE day proclamation as VE Day 80 flags are raised. At noon, pipers will play a specially written tune 'Celebration' from the top of the UK's four highest peaks. At 6.30 pm, cathedrals and churches will ring their bells and at 9.30pm more than 1000 beacons and hundreds of lamp lights of peace will shine throughout the UK, Channel Islands and the Isle of Man. People will join together and sing 'I vow to thee my country'.

At this time, when Europe and other parts of the world are rearing and peace seems frail, it's good to return to a day when people rejoiced after the great trial of World War and remind ourselves just how precious peace really is.

John Steele wrote a poem in 2020 for the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of VE Day and it was included in a u3a anthology published in 2023. He has kindly given permission for us to use his words, which dramatically capture the joy of that day.

### VE Day, 1945

And so the day unfolds red, white and blue,  
erupting into euphoria a long time coming,  
every conceivable emotion  
In ragtag procession over a mile long.  
Cosmopolitan crowds  
seething into the Square  
plunging into fountains  
figures hanging on for dear life to  
one another and the bronze manes of lions.  
People roaring!  
Streets raucous!  
Bugles and accordions rescued  
from cupboards and attics  
a once in a lifetime  
glad-time rag-time band.  
No more bad news!  
no more 'deeply regrets...'  
no more 'we must inform you...'  
or 'careless talk...'

One vast delirious village fete  
laughing, cheering, dancing,  
rising, falling, crescendos of  
colour and sound  
in brilliant sunshine.  
They battered the Good Lord's ears at  
St Paul's ten times that day,  
thousands of flushed angel faces giving thanks.  
And oh those faces!  
scarcely trusting themselves to believe  
to feel the strain of six long years,  
beginning to evaporate,  
pent-up feelings breaking loose.  
Flags waving, whistles blowing  
confetti fluttering, beer-barrels emptying  
A great dam of relief bursting  
and in its flood  
everyone swept away.  
And that singing – oh that singing!  
wave upon glorious wave –  
'We'll meet again'.

John Steele

Image: IWM (HU 41808)





The many helpers were kept busy preparing, serving and clearing up after the TCP Christmas lunch which was enjoyed by about 60 appreciative people.

**Cosy Café**  
**Christmas**  
**Sing-Along**

There's nothing like a good sing-song of Christmas music!



**Carols at The Orchard**

A group of church members sang carols to entertain the residents at The Orchard Nursing home where two of our church members now live.



## Christmas Fun



Making an Christmas Robin

Nativity

Christmas Tree decorating

Christmas Fun was enjoyed by all the children, parents and helpers on 21<sup>st</sup> December. A variety of art and craft activities were offered, and the morning finished with a short Nativity Service in the church, where the children dressed up and enacted the Christmas story. A good amount of money was raised was raised for Emmaus and Open Door.

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## Burns Lunch



On Thursday 23<sup>rd</sup> January we enjoyed a Burns Lunch at Cosy Café at Homewood. Jenny gave the Selkirk Grace, Archie piped in the haggis, which was addressed by David. Chris provided accordion music and accompanied community singing of the Bard's songs. John was MC and he and David recited a couple of Burns' poems. Charlie and her lady helpers, who had worked hard in the kitchen preparing the haggis, bashed neeps and chappit tatties, got a special round of applause.

## February Strollers

A small but hardy group enjoyed a stroll and chat around Heartwood Forest, followed by lunch at the John Bunyan public house.



## Chiswell Ramblers

Their March walk was held on a cold but bright day – Saturday 15th.

They began from the Round Bush Pub, Radlett, walked 4 miles round the Munden and then back for lunch at the Round Bush.

## Don't worry!

And thank you so much for your good wishes and cards while I was ill

*(Words of Jesus which came to mind when enjoying gifts of lovely spring flowers from kind friends during my recent illness – Sue Brooks.)*

'Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? And can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life? And why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these. but if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith? So do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring worries of its own. Today's trouble is enough for today.'

*Matthew 6:25-30:34*





## African adventure by Axel Kirby

In January, Glynis and I took the big holiday that we'd cancelled during Covid – but to a different destination: Botswana, in southern Africa. We're into bird-watching and we booked a two-week holiday that included 11 days' bird safari in the Okavango Delta, an inland river delta that attracts wildlife, including a huge number of species of birds – residents and migrants from Europe and other parts of Africa.

We'd booked in the “low” season, when the weather is hot and wet, so there were relatively few tourists: we were the only two on our safari.

We had a great experience. We slept in tents in four locations, travelled in a Safari truck, ate very well and were looked after by a team of three (plus guide), who also moved the camp from place to place. The tents were basic but comfortable, with an open-air “ensuite” in an attached enclosure. Although the camp-sites were unfenced, and local animals were free to wander through after lights out, we were secure, zipped into safety, listening to frequent (and nearby) lions, elephant and hyena. I never checked in the morning for tracks in the sandy soil: best not, for peace of mind.



The birding was brilliant. All-in-all, we noted 213 species in Botswana, not far off my total for ten years' birding in the UK. Without our guide, Vincent, we would have missed a lot, and spent much time trying to name what we did see. Not only

did Vince expertly drive the truck through sand, mud, swamp and water (ie, local roads), but he simultaneously spotted innumerable small birds in, on and under bushes, and he also named them for us. Mind you, we rapidly became familiar with some common species (“oh, just another Lilac-breasted Bee-eater”). We missed some sought-after birds, but there were many “lifers” for us, that is, species we'd never seen before. Ones that stick in my mind are Skimmers, Hamerkop, Barred Owlet, Yellow-billed Stork and Goliath Heron, amongst many. Some, however, are familiar to us here in the UK: Grey Heron, Willow Warbler, Barn Owl and Little Egret.



Although primarily a birding safari, other wildlife was easily found. Impala were common and various other species of antelope were everywhere. We avoided unpredictable buffalo, admired graceful giraffe and we were awed by the many elephants we encountered. It's interesting that the carnivores we found, lions, leopard, hyena and jackal, often fairly close by, were less of a threat than the larger herbivores: elephant warned or threatened us several times, buffalo can charge without provocation or warning and hippos are brutal and dangerous. We'd seen this on a previous holiday: ruthless killers would pass us by, apparently oblivious

to the potential buffet on wheels, within touching distance; more than that, several times lions would move on rather than enjoy our company.

As I've said, we were in the wet season, but we were rarely troubled by rain, which either occurred overnight or during the afternoon siesta. With one exception, however. We were travelling between campsites and had spent a relaxed few hours birding at a waterhole. Clouds were gathering and looking rather dark. We were caught in the truck, on an exposed section of sand road. It was biblical. Torrential rain, driven by strong wind and accompanied by lightning, soaked us within seconds, despite the rain capes we put on. The truck was no protection as the rain was driven horizontally through the open sides. Books and notebooks were also soaked, but subsequently rescued, and my camera and binoculars were also wet, despite being "sheltered" under the cape. After a temperamental morning, the camera and bins survived. Our clothes and shoes took most of the next day to dry out.

The safari ended in northern Botswana. We had a boat trip on the river, carefully avoiding hippos and crocodiles, and touching ground on the Namibian side. Then we were seen through the border into Zimbabwe and taken to our hotel in Victoria Falls (the town, not the water feature). What a change of style! A



WC, posh shower, balcony, air conditioning, restaurant and more! Sounds good, but we missed the simplicity of the bush camps and the immediacy of nature. Something about the tourism and people everywhere grated. I'm so glad we camped and travelled on land.

We had two nights before travelling back to the UK and filled our spare day with a trip to the Victoria Falls (the water feature, not the town), a boat cruise on the Zambezi and bird and wildlife watching from our balcony. As I've said, a brilliant two weeks.

One live issue in the birding community is the ethics of long-haul air travel. We did an eleven hour flight plus a nearly two hour flight within the region, both each way of course. How can I be concerned about the natural world and yet incur the carbon cost of our journeys? It is a tricky one, but a defence is: if no one travelled to such places, would they survive? Probably not, I think. Botswana has a growing population and many people depend on farming. There's growing conflict between farmers and wild animals: lions take cattle, so the herders poison the lions. Illegal but.... With lions dead, there's no predator for the elephants, whose numbers have swelled. This means that trees are destroyed and crops are flattened. However, 40% of Botswana is protected and visited by tourists. These visitors generate incomes for many – servicing and guiding tourists and protecting the wildlife and the wilderness. Without the tourist dollars that the wilderness generates, it's probable that these areas would succumb to development pressure.

And so the debate will continue. Another point: even if we had stayed at home, those flights would still have occurred, carrying people on business, visiting family, and so forth.

Date		At Homewood Road morning 10.30 unless otherwise shown.	At Homewood Road - Evening/ Afternoon 18.30 unless shown		At Greenwood morning 10.30 unless otherwise shown
Apr	6	Sheila Knopp (HC)	X		Songs of Praise
	13	Palm Sunday Rev'd John Steele	X		Streamed URC Service & HC
	17				Maundy Thursday 7pm at Greenwood
	18		2pm	Good Friday Harry Smith	No Service
	19		2pm - 5pm	Easter Saturday Ray Fraser	No Service
	20	Easter Day (HC) Rev'd John Steele	=		8.30 am: Breakfast 10:30 am: Mike Findley
	27	Martyn Macphee	6.30pm	Rev'd Jenny Mills	Rev'd Debbie Hodge 3pm
May	4	Mike Findley (HC)	6.30pm	Ray Fraser	Valerie Chapman
	11	Christian Aid Week Start Homewood Singers		(CTiM Service for Christian Aid Week)	Christian Aid Service 6pm
	18	Rev'd Jenny Mills	HC	Gill Elliott (HC)	Rev'd John Steele
	25	Stephen Poxon	6.30pm	Helen Griffiths	Elizabeth Harris
Jun	1	Rev'd Simon Carver (HC)	6.30pm	Harry Smith	Stephen Poxon
	8	Summer Family Service Pentecost - Worship Group led by Helen Griffiths & David Martin	6.30pm	Rev'd John Steele	Gill Elliott (HC)
	15	Adrian Whalley	HC	Sheila Knopp (HC)	Bob Little
	22	Mike Bramwell			Rev'd Debbie Hodge 3pm
	22				Mike Findley Midsummer Evening Service
	29	Rev'd David Ronco	6.30pm	Film from the Community Peacemaker Trust	Joint Service at HR

HC = Holy Communion; CTiM = Christians Together in Marshalswick CTSA = Christians together in St Albans

Coloured sections indicate school holidays and half-terms

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Gill Elliott	Anne Goldsmith	Sheila Knopp
Ray Fraser	Jenny Hawkins	David Martin
Sue Gray	Debbie Hodge	Philip Nixon

Website: [www.stalbansurc.org](http://www.stalbansurc.org)

