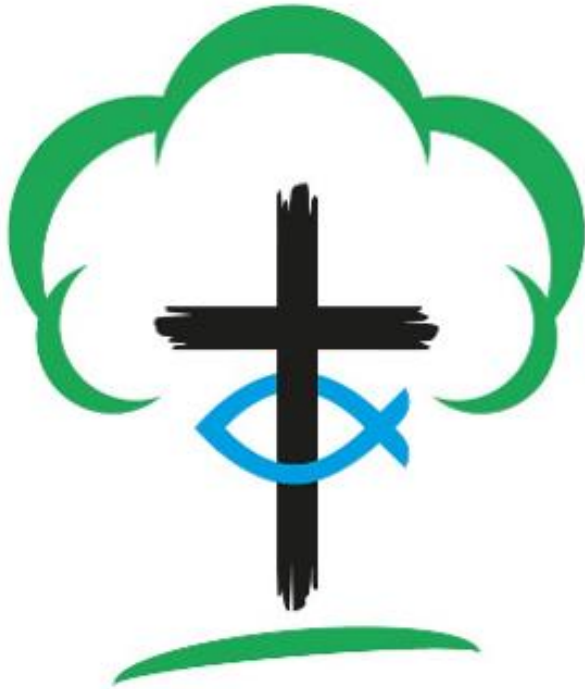


United Voices!



St Albans
**United
Reformed
Church**

The quarterly magazine of St. Albans United Reformed Church

Spring Edition

Issue 11—April 2026

From the Editorial Team:

Welcome to all our readers and the usual heartfelt thanks to all who have put pen to paper and dusted off their cameras. It is also cheering to welcome the spring season. Hopefully there will be more sunshine and less rain and clouds, especially as we are getting closer to the Easter festival which, for Christians, represents one of the most important and significant times in the Christian calendar.

Reflecting upon this also brings to mind the horrendous things which are happening in the Middle East and other parts of the world at this time. Although we are not dodging bombs, we are all, some more than others, experiencing the rapid rise in the cost of living which, as always, is affecting those who are already struggling to pay bills and to feed their children.

So we must all try and do our bit in whatever way we can.

And please also pray for those who have family in the Middle East who **are** dodging bombs.

We do hope that you enjoy reading this edition of United Voices and look forward to Edition 12.

Maggie Snyder, Sue Brooks, Gill Elliott editorunitedvoices@gmail.com

Call of Rev Naomi Young-Rodas to St Albans and Newland URC Pastorate , Heartland LAG

As most readers will know, following the “Preaching with a View” weekend at the end of January, a call was issued to Rev Naomi, and accepted. She and Claudia will be moving to St Albans in the second half of May, and her induction, led by Synod Moderator, Rev George Watt, will take place on Saturday 30th May at 3.00 pm at St Albans Homewood. There will also be a formal service of welcome in Newland led by Interim Moderator Rev James Fields (date to be advised). The four Preaching Plan organisers (one from each of the places of worship within the pastorate) have already met with Naomi to begin planning for the remainder of the year.

Our joint pastorate sits within the Heartland Local Area Group, which will be examining the scope, over time, for all the churches within the LAG to work more closely together within the geographical area which it covers.

Naomi will introduce herself in a future issue; in the meantime we look forward very much to welcoming her and Claudia to St Albans.



Lesley King

Letter from an Elder



Philip Nixon asks - Who are we?

The URC is of course an amalgamation of the Congregational and English Presbyterian traditions, together with the Churches of Christ and the Congregational Union of Scotland, who joined later. So, our own St Albans URC is an amalgamation of these traditions. But who were they and what influence do they have on us today?

Congregationalism has its origins in the Puritan movements following the teachings of John Calvin.

In England they welcomed the break from the Catholic Church but believed that the Church of England still had too many elements of Catholicism. They were initially known as Separatists because they wanted freedom to worship as they chose, free from the dictates of the Church of England. They endured considerable persecution in the 15th and 16th centuries, and many fled to Holland. It was such a group who embarked on the Mayflower to find more freedom in America.

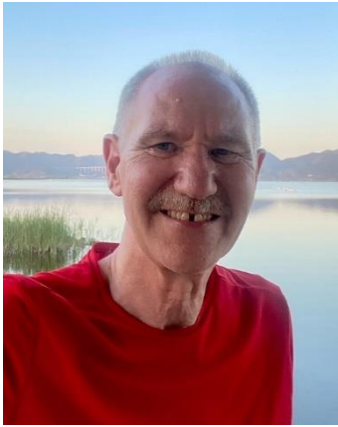
In contrast, the English Presbyterians (who were quite distinct from the Scottish Presbyterians) attempted to reform the Church of England from within. Both groups achieved considerable influence under the Commonwealth after the Civil War. However, after the Restoration many of their Ministers lost their livings, especially as they became part of the nonconformist movement, the Dissenters, that rejected the Act of Uniformity which attempted to enforce the use of the Book of Common Prayer. At this time some Dissenters used the name 'Presbyterian' because they regarded the doors of their chapels as open to all members (of good character) of the parish.

The Churches of Christ were a smaller group in the UK, though much stronger in the USA, where they originated in the early 19th century. They were a loose association of autonomous churches which developed from a revivalist movement which declared independence from denominations and traditional creeds. They sought "the unification of all Christians in a single body patterned after the original church described in the New Testament."

The history of Puritanism is very complicated with numerous different groups; these included the Ranters and the Muggletonians (shades of Harry Potter), but most would seem very rigid and fundamental to us today. However, it is important to remember that we come from a Dissenting tradition, and that spirit is maintained by our articles of association: "*We believe that Christ gives his Church a government distinct from the government of the state. In the things that affect obedience to God the Church is not subordinate to state but must serve the Lord Jesus Christ, as only Ruler and Head. Civil authorities are called to serve God's will of justice and peace for all humankind and to respect the rights of conscience and belief.*"

Let's meet

David Mooney



I was born in March 1952 in a small, terraced house in Leicester. I was the youngest child of Marian and Jim (known as Jimbo) with brother Chris and sisters Maureen and Sue. Before my first birthday I had a bad case of flu and the doctor told my mum I was unlikely to survive the night. Mum built up the fire, gave me a teddy bear intended for my upcoming birthday and nursed me through the night. I still have "big ted" although he is probably too fragile even for the repair shop magicians.



We moved to a council house in Leicester and I attended a secondary modern school where I scraped through with 4 'O' levels. Physics and maths were my strongest subjects so an apprenticeship with Post Office Telephones gave me a start. I went up the poles, down the holes, fitted phones in houses and factories and worked in the clunking and clicking telephone exchanges of the day. I have three people to thank for their influence on my early career. Firstly, my big brother Chris (my absolute Hero) was a radio technician in the Royal Signals and taught me the first principles of electricity. The second influencer was my training officer who put me on the ONC course instead of the standard City and Guilds pathway for telephone technicians. That came with a sacrifice of attending college two evenings and Saturday morning on top of the regular working hours but provided a higher level of qualification. The third key person was my lecturer who discerned some ability and encouraged me to apply to university. I wish I could thank the training officer and lecturer as they will never know how much they changed my life.

I went to Bath University on a sandwich course (academic semesters at Bath and industrial training with BT) in Electrical engineering. I had a blast at university but still managed to obtain a 2.1 honours degree. On one particular adventure I went to Ealing Town Hall where a university friend was the lead singer in a band. His sister was there with her friend, a rather attractive young lady named Helen. She was only 17 but somehow we stayed in touch without the internet, social media or even a mobile phone and married in 1975 after I graduated.

BT offered me a management position in North London at a new International Exchange (switching calls between the UK and overseas). I was put in charge of a computer system and given a staff of 12 technicians to operate and maintain the system. I really enjoyed the mix of technical and management challenges in a period of rapid technological advancement and political changes (privatisation of BT for example) and the international flavour of my work led me to a year's secondment to the development labs of Ericsson in Stockholm, Sweden and later a Directorship of BT's joint venture with an American company which required me to travel in US and Europe. BT dissolved the joint venture and after a while back in BT I took the opportunity of voluntary redundancy. I worked as a self-employed technical auditor for several years assessing telecom companies' billing accuracy to Ofcom standards (far more interesting than it sounds!) before properly retiring in 2014.

Of course, my life hasn't all been about work. 1980/81 was an exciting time. As mentioned, Helen and I moved to Sweden for a year, and it was during that time that our first child arrived – Charlotte. Edward was born in 1987. Charlotte is an English teacher and now lives in San Francisco with her partner, Dave, and we have 2 wonderful grandchildren, Eve 12 and Sam 8. Edward lives in South London and works for the homeless charity Crisis.

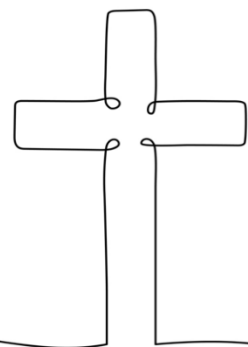
I played football from the age of 10 to 40 and my big brother Chris took me to watch Leicester City which is now in my blood for better or worse. I wasn't particularly good at sport so I'm not sure how I became captain of my class football team at junior school, captain of the house football team at secondary school, and captain of the electrical engineers' team at university. I gravitated to minority sports to seek honours. I won the university table football competition and made it to the quarter final of the national tournament. After university I took up raft racing and captained a St Albans team which went on to win the 100-mile River Wye raft race in 1992.



When my body told me it was time to move on from sport I developed my interest in music. At first I just strummed a guitar at home as therapy with no desire to perform. One year Ray Fraser press-ganged (sorry Ray) all the men at Church to join a men's chorus for Harvest festival and I really enjoyed it. As hall booking secretary, I took a booking for Rock Choir, and it seemed a good idea to go to the taster session to see how they were using our premises. I enjoyed that too so joined them and got a taste of performing among the safety of a large choir. Some years ago, Helen asked if I was interested in going to the St Albans Arena to see the Ukulele Orchestra of Great Britain. I wasn't initially thrilled with what I imagined would be a bunch of old guys playing George Formby songs, but Helen knew better. They turned out to be really good musically and very funny. Helen bought me my first ukulele for Christmas (does she now regret that?) and I now own a small collection and play with several local uke groups. We enjoy the music, the social side and we also raise money for charity.

I have left my Christian journey till last. Helen would take the children to Church at Homewood on a Sunday morning while I would head off to the Thames to train in preparation for the gruelling 100-mile race. I was also doing a fair amount of overseas business travel then in the early 90s and one day Helen said she would like to go with a party from Church to Spring Harvest. I was spending enough time apart from the family so I decided to go along without any expectation of changing my agnostic views. While there, I attended the studies and celebrations and my perspective changed subtly but significantly. As I mentioned, the time came for me to hang up my paddle and I started to attend Homewood on Sunday mornings. My involvement and commitment has grown over the years. I have had spells as an Elder, hall bookings secretary, rota clerk and currently I convene the Homewood site management team, am a member of the "Green Team", the "Audio-visual" team, the music group and Homewood Singers. I especially like the friendships and sense of belonging that come with being a Church member.

Some of my non-Christian friends think that being a Christian is a kind of hobby. How do we explain that it is the foundation of our life? It gives our life meaning and direction, and puts everything into context. Thank you for letting me share my story with you.



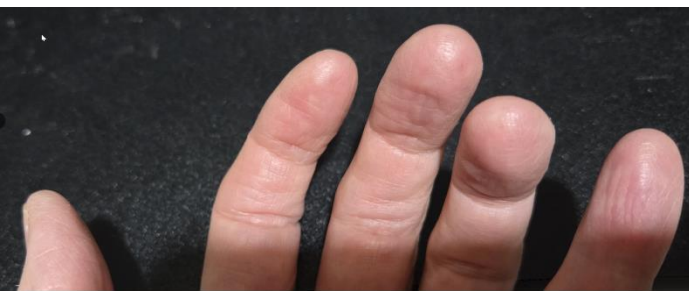
Fingertips

*Fingertips, fingertips
can you believe that
when I blow a kiss out
there from my lips
someone receives it
believes in it
blows it back from their lips
all with the aid of their
fingertips.*

*Fingertips, fingertips
can you believe that
when I touch a surface
you leave a print
distinctive, unique
it's of me that you speak
sits where it has landed
with other heavy-handed
fingerprints.*

*Fingertips, fingertips
can you believe that
when I think of your power
how lightly spent
all the world's madness
badness, sadness, gladness
sits in my hands
but awaits your consent
fingertips.*

John Steele



A different New Year

by Axel Kirby

So, what were you doing on New Year's Day? Nursing a hangover? Pulling the duvet up to your chin?

Not the Kirby household. We were up bright(ish) and early. By 9am we were at Staines Reservoirs looking for some unusual birds and anything else present. We weren't alone –several other birders



were doing the same thing. Every hobby has its drawbacks, ours can be horrible weather, long journeys and disappointment; it also has successes, camaraderie and fresh air.

I suppose I've always had some awareness of birds – unlike some – and I've always picked out most garden birds. I only set out on serious "bird nerd" training about fifteen years ago when family friend Steve got us interested in wildlife during our regular walks. We were introduced to several local bird sites and others further afield, broadening our interest, awareness and identification skills.

We go on specialised bird watching holidays, as well as taking binoculars and field guides on more "normal" ones. Apart from visiting unusual, less-frequented places we find wildlife in tourist spots, which adds interest to a conventional sight-seeing trip. The birding holidays have taken us to out of the way places such as Armenia (stunning scenery and exceptional birdlife), Lewis in the Hebrides (caught covid!), Bulgarian salt pans and moors and relaxed Menorca. The fellow travellers provide knowledge, more eyeballs and conversation. And the organised tours are "all-in", removing the worries of organisation and research.

On the other hand, there are plenty of places with more general interest and Glynis often says that we don't *have* to always go on birding holidays – talk which could be construed as mutiny. However, our holidays in Lisbon, the Lake District and Donegal have been lovely adventures, sometimes missing a few places of interest, but always delightful. As I've said, I'm a nerd; so I take binoculars (so does Glynis), field guide and notebook. In Lisbon, we walked to castles, mansions, museums and monasteries and still noted the birds we saw. As we did in New Zealand, Hungary and elsewhere.



Glynis does mutter about my interest (aka obsession), but joins in, often with more determination than I have. On one occasion, we'd extended a visit to Lincolnshire to go to Bempton Cliffs near Bridlington, so as to find a vagrant albatross and view the seabirds that breed there. The Gannets, Kittiwakes, etc were fantastic to see, but we missed the albatross on our first and second visits. Glynis insisted on a third attempt, which was successful – seeing that lonely, magnificent bird was stunning; it was Glynis' persistence that had delivered. As it did on New Year's Day.



Viewing at Staines Reservoirs is restricted to an exposed, mile-long causeway that divides the two basins. After half an hour, I was ready to leave, but Glynis had spotted a knot of birders at the far end and decided that we would see what they were seeing. It paid off, again. Two of the sought-after birds, a Black Redstart and a Black-necked Grebe were found plus several commoner species. We'd already noted a Greater Scaup, with the help of better birders than us, so off to the car and a hot drink. We visited three more locations on that day – Stockers Lake, Watercress nature reserve and St Albans Cathedral. All were successful, although the cathedral visit was more to

view the whales there.

New Year's Day is often used by birders to kick-start the year; in favourable places, the target is 100. We got nowhere near that - we counted just 48 – but watching tits and finches raid bird feeders, dainty Goldcrest flitter near our heads and a lucky view of a Peregrine over-flying us was a fraction of the reward for our effort. Maybe we'll see the divers and vagrant warblers another day. Also, the chat and help from better-informed birders gives a sense of unselfish community, which we like.

My GP is usually impressed when I report three and four mile hikes, but she's unaware that they're dawdles with frequent stops to look at something. Which suits me, at my age.

If you're interested, check-out the local RSPB website, or set up bird feeders, or just get a field guide to help you name the birds you see in your garden or park. It adds interest to a walk and keeps the brain ticking over.



***Can you identify the birds in these photos, which were taken at Watercress Local Nature Reserve?
Answers on page 16.***



Keen birders may enjoy the live webcam on the roof of St Albans' Cathedral, where they can watch Alban and Boudica (the resident Peregrines) as they return to hopefully raise more chicks in 2026!

<https://www.stalbanscathedral.org/peregrine-live-cam>



Thames North Synod Eco Day: Nature on Our Doorstep

**Saturday, June 13th, 2026 | 9:30 AM – 4:00 PM Amersham
Free Church, Woodside Road, Amersham, HP6 6AJ**

Join us for the Thames North Synod Eco Day at Amersham Free Church! We're looking forward to welcoming fellow churchgoers for a day of eco-themed workshops and discussions. The church is a 10-minute walk from Amersham Station (Metropolitan and Chiltern lines). There is also parking, with easy access via the M25.

Please contact Colleen Fraser at modpa@thamesnorthurc.org to let us know you're attending and to help us plan for lunch. Booking details will be provided later.

Programme Highlights:

- 9:30 AM: Arrival & registration (by 10:10 AM)
- 10:10 AM: Worship, followed by a presentation on "Transforming Public Places for Nature and People" by Amersham's gold medal-winning "Amersham in Bloom" volunteers.
- Workshops on eco topics: drawing plant life, caring about hedgehogs, energy saving in our buildings, gardening, and hymn writing.
- Lunch: Ploughman's style with vegan and gluten-free options.
- Afternoon: Optional walk to the River Misbourne, with easy downhill walking (sturdy shoes needed). We'll take the bus back to the church in time for tea.
- Final worship and plenary session.



Children are welcome! School age children will find plenty to interest them in the programme, and there will be a space for younger ones to play.

We look forward to spending the day with you!



People interested in eco activities may like to investigate the Green Christian St Albans Website <https://www.saint-lukes.co.uk/green-christian-st-albans>

They can also be followed on Social Media: <https://www.facebook.com/greenchristian.stalbans>

Or join their WhatsApp group: <https://chat.whatsapp.com/J7K0uoQiGFc658GTtN9VeY>



South St Albans Churches Travelling Plant Sale

Supporting Christian Aid

This year, South St Albans churches are joining together to raise funds through a travelling plant sale — and Greenwood would love your support. You can help by donating plants or seedlings for others to buy or come along, browse and pick up a few green-fingered bargains. Please spread the word to friends and neighbours too.

Plant sale dates and locations

- **St Albans URC-Greenwood**, Watford Road, AL2 3JY. Friday 15 May, 3–5pm
- **St Stephen's**, Watling Street, St Albans, AL1 2PT. Saturday 16 May, 9am–12 noon
- **St Bartholomew's**, 47 Vesta Avenue, St Albans, AL1 2PE. Saturday 16 May, 5.30–7.30pm and Sunday 17 May, 9–11am
- **St Julian's**, 3 Abbot's Avenue, St Albans, AL1 2HY. Sunday 17 May, 12–3pm

Hedgehogs at our Greenwood site



Last July, I was at the Soroptimist Summer Social at our Greenwood site when someone excitedly shouted, "Look, a hedgehog!" I rushed outside to take a photo of the hedgehog in the church field, and I was overjoyed. It had been a long time since I had seen a hedgehog, and it was a lovely surprise. As one of the church's eco champions, I've worked hard for years to make the field more wildlife-

friendly. I'd worried that the recent building work might have harmed the local wildlife, so seeing a hedgehog meant that nature was still thriving.

However, it's important to remember that hedgehogs are in danger nationally. Surveys show that hedgehogs have disappeared from a third of urban areas, and their numbers in rural areas have dropped by as much as 75% since the early 2000s. This is mainly due to habitat loss and road accidents.

How can we help? Like all creatures, hedgehogs need food, water, and shelter. They also need space to move around and protection from dangers like cars and chemicals. One garden is not enough to support them; neighbours should work together, creating "hedgehog highways" - gaps in fences between gardens. This will allow hedgehogs to move safely from one place to another. Also, gardeners should avoid using harmful chemicals. If you have hedgehogs visiting your garden, consider joining the Hedgehog Conservation Society's monitoring programme to track the local hedgehog population. You can find more information on websites like Wilderhood Watch and Hedgehog Street.

Anna Barrett

Remembering Christmas events

Although we are now well into spring, let us take a moment to remember some of the wonderful things that were happening in our church last Christmas.



Many members of the congregation knitted and crocheted Christmas tree stocking decorations. They were taken to local care homes.

Helen M and other flower ladies decorated a tree that was displayed as part of St Saviour's Tree Festival. The theme of our tree was photos of St Albans past and present.



A group of members and friends took a coach to The Royal Albert Hall again last December to enjoy the John Rutter Christmas concert. Thanks once again to Ray for organising the trip.



And thanks to the Homewood Singers for leading our very own Carol Service on the theme of 'Angel Voices'. The choir sang a couple of Rutter's carols as well as others on the theme, and the congregation had a chance to join in with some old favourites.



Many members of our congregation made very generous donations of new toys for the children who use the local food bank. They were most gratefully received by Verso (formerly FEED) and I'm sure they were greatly appreciated by the parents and children who received them.

Christmas Fun

On the morning of Saturday 20th December, about 25 children attended Christmas fun with their parents or carers. Many crafts were enjoyed by the children and adults alike, refreshments were served, and the morning finished with a short Crib Service in the church – a chance for the children to dress as the characters, to learn about the Christmas story and sing some carols. £50 was raised for our Christmas charities – Emmaus and Open Door.



Using Nativity stickers



Making a rocking Santa



JESUS IS BORN



Acting out the Nativity story



The children made this big picture

Thanks to all the children, parents and most of all, the faithful helpers – we couldn't do any of the Fun Mornings without your invaluable assistance.

The Christmas Fun Prayer

*Thank you for the baby who came on Christmas Day.
Thank you it was Jesus, who came to earth to stay.
Thank you that you love us and always will be near,
Thank you God for Christmas, this happy time of year.*

Amen

Cosy Café



At the last Cosy Café of 2025 we enjoyed a Christmas Sing-Along. Piano, guitar, ukulele and cornet accompanied popular Christmas songs for all to join in with.



In January, the Burns Lunch Cosy Café was very well attended. The traditions of piping in the haggis, addressing the haggis and eating the haggis with 'tatties and neeps' were appreciated by all. This was followed by Scottish music and songs. Great fun was had by all!

And in February Chinese New Year was remembered with some people making Chinese lanterns, fortune cookies were shared and Jenny G told the story of how the animals were chosen to represent each new year.



Strollers



The December Strollers walk (above) was a wet one around St Albans, led by Ray. He gave us a lot of historical information and took us to Alban's Well, then for refreshment in the Court House before returning to The King Harry pub for lunch.

The February stroll, led by Hilary and Philip, was on the most beautiful day of the year so far, starting and finishing at The Brocket Arms, Ayot St Lawrence, stopping at Ayot St Peter church yard to enjoy the daffs.

Many thanks to Sue and Stuart Gray for organising all the strollers walks from its inception until the end of 2025, and to Janet and Keith MacBain for taking over the coordination, and to all the leaders of the walks each month.

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Singles Sunday Lunch Club



The Singles Sunday Lunch Club is a relatively new initiative, organised by Heather Olsen. Once a month a group of 'singles' enjoy lunch and a chat at a local pub. The February lunch (above) was at The Green Man, Sandridge.

Book Club



The Book Club meets approximately every two or three months to discuss a book chosen by one of the group. Occasionally, a cinema trip is organised if there is a film of the chosen book. Most recently, we read and saw the films 'Conclave' and 'Hamnet'.

Hymn of Love

Timeless words by Heather Olsen

Fill us with Your Love O Lord
Today and every day
Guide us in everything we do
Tell us what to say

LOVE IS SHARING
LOVE IS CARING
LOVE IS GIVING ALL

By Your living and Your dying
You have shown us Lord
That the way of Love
Is more effective than the sword

Help this war-torn world of ours
To find the way of love
Guide all our politicians
To seek help from above

Let's pool the world's resources
Please teach us how to share
Forgive us for our greed Lord
There is enough to spare

Help us Lord to play our part
In working towards peace
To live in harmony ourselves
Till all hatreds cease

Your love is not selective
Help us to love like You
The people we dislike Lord
Help us to love them too

Perfect Your Love in us Lord
We cannot turn away
There are people who need You
Help us to show the way

Help us to share Your Love Lord
With each and everyone
And not to cease from caring
Until our life is done

(May 2nd 1982)

What is Wild Church?

Following the Preaching with a View service led by our, soon to be, new Minister, we were able to ask questions. My question came from a long-held conviction that the Greenwood site had a strong potential to be a base for a Wild or Forest church so I asked Naomi if this form of worship would be of interest to her and I was pleased with her positive response. But what exactly do I mean by Wild church?

The modern Wild Forest Church movement began in the United Kingdom in the early 21st century, inspired in part by the Fresh Expressions initiative within the Church of England. It is a form of Christian worship and spiritual gathering that takes place outdoors, usually in natural settings such as woodlands, parks, or countryside areas. Rather than meeting inside a traditional church building, participants gather among trees, fields, rivers, or other natural spaces. It is not a case of simply holding a service outside, rather it is aimed at deepening our relationship with God by exploring 'the second book of God', which is the term used by Forest Church proponents for all creation. It draws from a long Christian tradition of encountering God in creation — echoing biblical themes found in Genesis, the Psalms, and the teachings of Jesus, who frequently taught outdoors.

At its heart, Forest Church seeks to:

- **Reconnect faith and creation** – emphasizing care for the Earth and attentiveness to the natural world as part of Christian discipleship.
- **Create accessible worship spaces** – especially for those who may feel disconnected from conventional church settings.
- **Encourage contemplative spirituality** – using silence, observation, and sensory awareness as ways of prayer.
- **Build community** – often through shared walks and other outdoor activities, simple liturgies, storytelling, and seasonal celebrations.

A Forest Church gathering might include reading scripture under a tree canopy, reflecting on ecological themes, singing simple songs, or marking seasons such as Advent or Easter in ways that engage the surrounding landscape. Activities are often interactive and suitable for all ages.

It seems to me that establishing a wild church in our field, with the core elements listed above, might be beneficial for our church.

Anna Barrett

Answers to bird photo quiz on pages 7&8

Photo 1: Goldcrest; Photo 2: Long-tailed tit; Photo 3: Bullfinch:

Photo 4: Nuthatch

Ethics Girl

by Gill Elliott

As a Christmas present I now have a subscription to Ethical Consumer Magazine. As Christians we are aware of ethical considerations when we shop; in church we use Fairtrade tea and coffee, encourage folks to bring their own cups, and provide cups that can be recycled. However, if we wish to go into more detail or greater depths with our ethical spending, looking at Ethical Consumer magazine can help to inform us. For instance, thanks to their recommendations I no longer use Spotify for listening to music online, but have now switched to Qobuz; Qobuz pays the artists more, get 100% for their tax conduct, treat their staff much better, and have a higher quality of music as an added bonus! And the costs are similar.



I thought I would start a regular short piece in our magazine summarising some of the articles to tell you about things to consider if you wanted to spend your money in a more ethically informed way.

Music streaming may be a bit niche, so I am going to start with High Street fast food outlets – and you may be surprised by the results! You may not be surprised to learn that McDonald's, Subway and Burger King scored below 10; however, so did Pizza Hut, Domino's and Papa John's. Caffè Nero, Upper Crust and Pret a Manger hover around the 20/100 mark, with Itsu managing 26/100. The top two scorers (although still only in the 40s) were LEON and Greggs! Greggs did better than many in the survey because they pay their taxes, and also use Fairtrade coffee. They also come out close to the top of the list of coffee shops (although again only 48/100) for the same reason. Black Sheep, AMT and Pret a Manger were fairly close behind. However, only the Boston Tea Party chain of coffee shops (none of which are located in Hertfordshire) scored more than 20/100 for company ethics (including how they treated their staff).

If there is a product you are particularly interested in, or want more details, do ask me when you see me or email on editorunitedvoices@gmail.com. Looking forward to hearing from you!

Austria in winter

by Sue Brooks

If you know the film 'The Sound of Music' well, you may know that it was filmed in and around Salzburg in Austria. Salzburg is also where Mozart was born and lived. As I had only been to Vienna before, last December I went on a short winter holiday tour in the area with two friends. There were many highlights, but the overall star was the incredible snowy scenery. Travelling from our base in a coach, we were warm and comfortable, whilst gazing through the windows at magnificent mountains, waterfalls, fast-running streams and branches feathered with snow. It was bitterly cold. We wore walking boots to avoid slips but the efficient Austrians kept pathways clear.



In a walking tour of Salzburg, we visited the huge cathedral, where a very keen organist was in a decibel duel with our guide! We moved on to see Mozart's birthplace, where he also lived until the family moved for more space. In free time, we visited the big Christkindlmarkt (Christ Child market) in the central square,

picking up small gifts and eating smashed pancakes with apple or berries from the foodstalls for lunch. The convent where the real Maria von Trapp had been a nun was also pointed out.

Another highlight was a visit to the quaint lakeside village of St Gilgen, followed by a trip to St Wolfgang and its stunning scenery. Here we took an hour's carriage ride up a hill to glimpse the nearby lake. One of our horses had eaten too much and the carriage driver had to stop every five minutes and scoop up what it had deposited on the road, which gave us all a good chuckle. It was bitterly cold, but we were covered in rugs. St Wolfgang also hosted a traditional Christmas market.

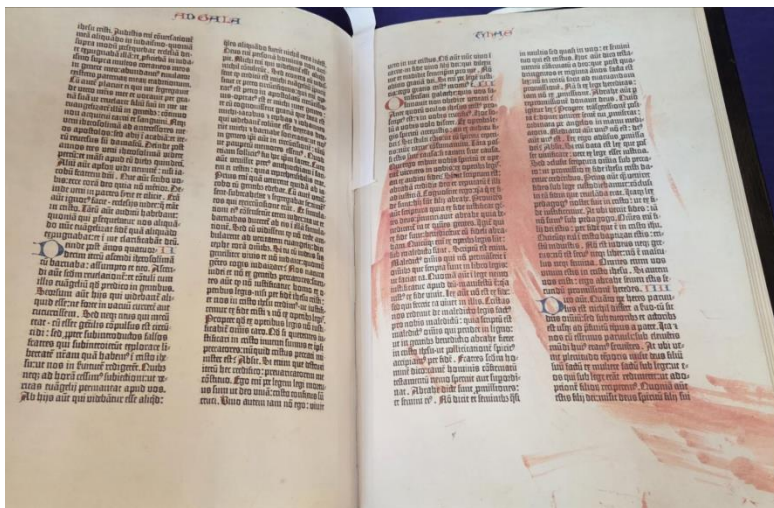


That evening we were introduced to an old Austrian seasonal custom. We had a visit from St Nicholas and the Krampus. St Nicholas gives out sweets to the good children, whilst the frighteningly ugly Krampus, half-goat, half man, visits to see who hasn't been good. The group of Krampuses bang loud drums and ring loud bells to herald their coming. I thought small children might be terrified, until I spotted a miniature Krampus!



One evening there was a Mozart dinner in Salzburg, which was in a magnificently decorated hall. Food was served and, in between, extracts from Mozart's compositions were played and sung. The high-calibre singers and musicians were all dressed in costumes from Mozart's time. A lovely evening out!

On our last day, we visited the lakeside town of Halstatt, a Unesco World Heritage Site. Its preserved old houses and lakeside scenery were beautiful and we had a scenic boat trip on the lake. Another day of wondering how often one would say "ooh" or "aah" at the sheer beauty of creation. A marvellous trip all round.



This is a Gutenberg Bible, held by the John Rylands Library in Manchester. The text in black is printed, and then the coloured sections are inserted by hand. After this the book is bound. In this copy, the artist must have been asked to make an amendment to this page; imagine his horror when the ink was spilt! Had the book not already been bound, the page could have been reprinted and the colouring redone. But, on the plus side, this edition of the Bible is unique, which makes it very special to the John Rylands Library.

A visit to the library is highly recommended if you are in the area, and it is absolutely free!

St Albans URC Preaching Plan 2026 v1.5

Date		At Homewood Road morning 10.30 unless otherwise shown.	At Greenwood	At Homewood Road - Evening/Afternoon 18.30 unless shown
Apr	2	Maundy Thursday	joint at Homewood	
	3	Good Friday		
	4	Easter Saturday Meditative Vigil Ray Fraser		
	5	Easter Sunday Gill Elliott	Anna Barrett & Sheila Knopp	
	12	Worship Group, led by David Martin	Rev'd John Steele	
	19	Adrian Whalley	Mike Findley	Mike Findley (HC)
	26	Mike Bramwell	David Jonathan	Hilary & Philip
May	3	Martyn Macphee (HC)	Worship Group	Jenny Graham
	10	Worship Group	Rev'd Simon Carver	Christian Aid service at MFBC
	17	Stephen Poxon	Tony Graham	Sheila Knopp (HC)
	24	Pentecost Karen Campbell	Mike Findley	Harry Smith
	30	Induction of Revd Naomi Young-Rodas 3 pm		
	31	Joint at Greenwood	Stephen De Silva	Mike Findley
Jun	7	Revd Naomi Young-Rodas (HC)	Philip Nalpanis	Helen Mooney & Helen Griffiths
	14	Worship Group	Gill Elliott	Revd Naomi Young-Rodas
	21	Adrian Whalley	Rev'd Naomi Young-Rodas	Martyn McPhee (HC)
	28	Revd John Steele	Valerie Chapman	Fiona Smith
Jul	5	Rev'd Simon Carver (HC)	Stephen De Silva	Revd Naomi Young-Rodas
	12	Revd David Ronco	Rev'd Robert Fletcher	CTiM Songs of Praise at Homewood 3 pm
	19	David Jonathan	Rev'd Naomi Young-Rodas	Gill Elliott (HC)
	26	Homewood Singers	Fiona Smith	Revd John Steele
Aug	2	Revd Dawn Savige (HC)	Harry Smith	Fiona Smith
	9	Revd Naomi Young-Rodas	Gill Elliott	Sheila Knopp
	16	Karen Campbell	Rev'd Naomi Young-Rodas	Mike Findley (HC)
	23	Worship Group	Cameron Varley	Revd John Steele
	30	Harry Smith	joint at Homewood	Jackie Wilson

HC = Holy Communion; CTiM = Christians Together in Marshalswick;
MBFC = Marshalswick Baptist Free Church; grey shaded rows indicate school holidays.

Administrator: Charlie Thurlby
homewoodhalls@stalbansurc.org

Tel: 07709 924347

Greenwood site: **Wafford Road, Chiswell Green, AL2 3HG**

Homewood Road site: **Homewood Road, St. Albans, AL1 4BH**

Current Trustee Elders		
Elizabeth Barrett	Helen Griffiths	Lesley King
Gill Elliott	Anne Goldsmith	Sheila Knopp
Ray Fraser	Jenny Hawkins	David Martin
	Mike Findley	Philip Nixon

Website: www.stalbansurc.org

