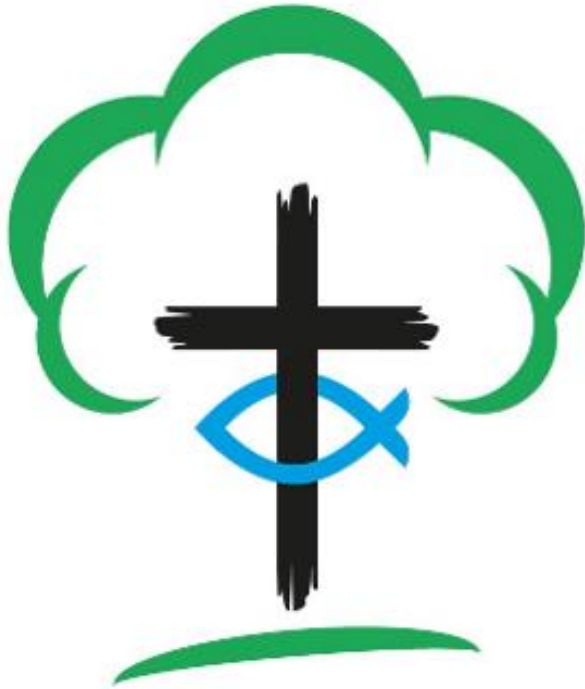


United Voices!



St Albans
**United
Reformed
Church**

The quarterly magazine of St. Albans United Reformed Church

Summer Edition

Issue 12—July 2026

From the Editorial Team:

Welcome to all our readers to this, the 12th edition of United Voices.

We have an exciting time ahead, which actually started a few weeks ago at the beginning of June with the induction of our new minister, Revd Naomi Young-Rodas. It was a lovely service and well attended, with people from the four different church congregations that she will be caring for. So, a very warm welcome to Naomi and of course to her wife, Claudia. We all hope that they will be very happy in this part of the country.

As the saying goes, 'Times they are a changing' but this change is something that we look forward to.

We send our usual grateful thanks to all those who have contributed to this issue and please remember to keep your articles coming as we rely upon them to keep United Voices going. So.....

Happy reading.

Maggie Snyder, Sue Brooks, Gill Elliott

editorunitedvoices@gmail.com

This is your magazine!

As Maggie has said in her editorial letter above, without all your contributions there would be no magazine. As its name suggests, it is intended to give everyone in St Albans URC a voice if they wish to contribute.

Without doubt, one of the most popular features has been 'Let's meet...' – an idea from Lesley King early on. Many people have kindly shared their life stories, journeys of faith or parts of their lives, such as childhood or pastimes, with us. It has been an antidote to a comment one often hears at funerals, "I wish I'd known all that about her when she was alive!"

We haven't quite finished with this feature yet, but are now also looking for some new ways to keep your magazine as interesting and vibrant in the future. So please let us have your ideas for what you would like to see in forthcoming editions.

Can be articles, pictures, photos or anything you'd like to share.

We have some thoughts too, but we'd love to hear from you!

Situations vacant

We have room on our team rota of talented people who organise and run the sound and vision desk at the back of the church for our services. It may look daunting, but training will be given and, like anything else, will become easier with practice! For more information, please speak to David Martin.

Minister's letter

For my first piece for United Voices (love the name, btw!) I thought I'd tell you a bit more about myself.



Both my parents and their parents were Congregationalists. I'm just old enough to have been baptised in the Congregational Church but the URC was formed when I was only 3, so I have only ever been an URC member. My dad was a minister and so we all grew up going to church, attending Girl's Brigade and reading in church. I have two older sisters, two nephews and two nieces (all now unbelievably aged 40ish) and quite a lot of great-nephews and nieces, though I imagine that Monty, born a few months ago, will be the last.

I was born and grew up in Essex, though both my parents were from the north – mum from Yorkshire and dad from Sunderland. I am proud of my northern heritage and tend not to think of myself as an Essex girl. As a child I always wanted to be a writer and I have had three novels published (ask me if you'd like more details). I was also very interested in art and planned to go to art college until I failed my art A level, when I thought perhaps a career in art wasn't for me.

My first job after school was as a 'home-help' – helping the elderly in their own homes. I then volunteered at Casa Locarno, a World Council of Churches rest centre in Switzerland. It started as a place for ministers from behind the Iron Curtain to have a break and my parents went there after my dad had heart surgery. I loved it so much I did another three months at Bossey, the WCC Conference Centre near Geneva.

I eventually studied linguistics at university, including Spanish, and then lived in Guatemala for almost two years towards the end of the civil war, initially teaching English and then working for the Presbyterian Church there, teaching, translating and doing human rights work. I worked at URC Church house for a time and then for a few years at a charity based in a Presbyterian Church in Austin, Texas. On return to the UK, I got an administrative job at the University of Cambridge and ended up working there for 14 years. While there I was an Elder at St Columba's URC. The second half of those years was at the Institute of Criminology which was very interesting and included helping with a study about prisoners who were fathers and editing the book produced for the institute's 50th anniversary.

After a change of bosses resulting in much less work, I realised I didn't want to do admin for the rest of my life and began exploring options which soon narrowed to the ministry. Everyone I spoke to said they could see me as a minister, so I went through the very rigorous candidating process and studied at Westminster College Cambridge obtaining a BTh from Cambridge University and then undertaking various placements including hospital chaplaincy, an interfaith placement in Bradford and Oasis (amongst other things they have a small farm that young people visit) in London. I even did a course with prisoners inside HMP Whitemoor - a high security prison – quite an experience. One of the visiting tutors was Rowan Williams.

Claudia and I met in London while I was a student and we married in Cambridge in 2018. I accepted a call to the churches in Essex in late 2019 and we adopted Dexter in early 2020 –

before the pandemic when everyone else adopted dogs! He is a Jug – a Jack Russell/Pug cross of a rather nervous disposition. He loves people but doesn't much like other dogs. He often attends smaller meetings and gatherings, but Sunday mornings are too many people for him. If anyone would like to take care of him for the occasional day or if we go away (non-UK) – please let us know.

I am passionate about the environment, and other often mentioned topics include refugees, homelessness, the Palestinian situation and the need for the church to be relevant in everyday life.

I love reading (pretty much anything except horror and romance). In the pandemic I took up art again and when I have time enjoy painting, sketching and photography. If anyone is on Instagram – I sometimes post my art there – I'm revnaomi22. I have been learning the piano for about a year – I had lessons as a child but didn't get very far before I switched to the flute. I'm no Fats Waller (my dad's favourite) nor Lang Lang and never will be, but I enjoy it.

Some practical things:

My phone number is 07555 705530

Email: revnaomi@yahoo.com

My usual day off is Saturday, when I won't answer the phone or look at email.



I very much look forward to being your minister, getting to know you all (sorry, it will take me a while with names, I'm better at faces) and working with you so St Albans URC can continue to be the exciting, vibrant place it already is, and even more

A message from Claudia Young-Rodas:

I just wanted to say thank you for the very warm welcome I've received from all of you. I've already attended the Cosy Café and I look forward to having a walk with the Strollers. I'm now helping out with the Wednesday Lunch Club and will soon start some volunteering at the Cathedral and the Hospice (Rennie Grove Peace). I am also looking for paid employment, so if you, or anyone you know of, is interested in either of the following, please contact me on 07432 461452, or speak to me at church

One-to-one, or small group Spanish conversation (not free, but fee negotiable)

Care in the home – light housework, help with laundry – changing bedding, ironing, taking out rubbish, shopping, making drinks, heating up food (I don't cook much!), companionship, other caring tasks. I have experience taking care of an elderly gentleman some years ago when I lived in London, and am DBS checked (for the Lunch Club). I can provide work references, if required.



ART and CRAFT FAIR

Saturday 3rd October

2.00 - 4.30pm

and

Sunday 4th October

11.30am - 1.00pm



Are you an artist or crafter who would like the chance to display some of your creations? Well, now is the chance for you to gather some of your work together to be displayed at our Art and Craft Fair. You may be into painting, drawing, calligraphy, pottery, woodwork, quilting, knitting, or one of the many other arts or crafts...

If you would like to display your work on a table or display board, please contact Elizabeth Barrett, Ray Fraser or Anne Goldsmith in person before September 6th, or tel. 07866 766 882 or email annie_lou@hotmail.com

On Saturday 3rd October the Art and Craft displays will be shown in the Main Hall between 2.00 and 4.30pm. Refreshments will be served.

On Sunday 4th October there will be another chance to view the displays after the morning service. Again, refreshments will be available.

The induction of our new Minister



(Pictured: Revd Naomi with Thames North Synod Moderator Geoge Watt)

A packed St Albans URC Homewood attended a special service on Saturday, 30 May – the induction of our new minister to her pastorate, as well as churches further afield.

Revd Naomi Young-Rodas now has responsibility for St Albans URC at Homewood and Greenwood and Newland Church in Luton and Dunstable. She has been called to be part of a team ministry that covers Heartland Local Area Group of United Reformed Churches, a wide area of Hertfordshire and Bedfordshire.

During the service Revd Naomi described the path that led her to answer the call to her new churches. Coming from Essex, where her father was also a URC minister, she had an interesting and varied career, taking in volunteering in Switzerland and also including periods of church work in Guatemala and Texas. She also held roles in the national URC offices and Cambridge University.

She came to ministry later in life and her previous pastorate was in Essex, at Rayleigh and Westcliff-on-Sea URC churches. She aims to help her churches serve the communities around them and show the love of God towards all people. She and her wife, Claudia, will live in St Albans.

The service was presided over by Revd George Watt, Moderator of Thames North Synod, assisted by Revd James Fields, who had oversight of the churches during the ministerial vacancy. The sermon was given by Revd Dr Jennifer Smith, Superintendent Minister of Wesley's Chapel and Leysian Mission Methodist Church in London.

During this joyful occasion, Revd Naomi was greeted by Elders from her new churches. She was also introduced to representatives from several other churches and denominations - including Methodism and the Grassroots Project in Luton, Churches Together in St Albans, City Centre Churches and Churches Together in Marshalswick.

Olga Hopkins at No 10 Downing Street!

A select gathering of Second World War veterans was recently held at 10 Downing Street to mark the 81st anniversary of the ending of the war and Olga Hopkins was invited to attend. The five veterans enjoyed a delicious tea party, at which they all had a chance to talk to Prime Minister Sir Keir Starmer. "I was surprised to be invited and found it a great honour," Olga says.

After sharing wartime experiences with Sir Keir, Olga told him. "On behalf of myself, my friends and my church, thank you for not taking us into war with Iran", at which the other veterans applauded. "He is a charming man," says Olga, "he listened carefully to all of us".

After the Prime Minister left, the veterans were shown the Cabinet Meeting Room and they were allowed to sit in the Prime Minister's armchair, given to the Cabinet by Sir Winston Churchill. Churchill broadcasted from here to tell the country that the treaty to end the war had been signed. "I found it all very moving and I was very pleased I went", she concludes.



(Photo: copyright 10 Downing Street.)

Why Feel-Good Sunday Afternoons? by Anna Barrett

Some years ago, during an ecumenical Lent course organised by South St Albans Churches, I was struck by the challenging question: "**How can your church be a blessing to your community?**" My first reaction was, "How can we ever be a blessing if people don't seem to recognise that we exist?" I had no answer, but the question stayed with me.

A few years later, during the Covid pandemic, I attended an online workshop series run by the URC on Fresh Expressions of Church. I found it fascinating. Fresh Expressions can emerge from all sorts of situations and communities: community farms, digital communities, bikers, skateboarders, and many more.

A Fresh Expression of Church is a form of church for our changing culture, established primarily for the benefit of people who are not already members of any church. It develops through listening, serving the community, contextual mission, making disciples, and gradually shaping a form of church reflecting both the gospel and the culture it serves. It is not intended primarily to grow or replace an existing congregation, but a different expression of church alongside it.

There is a recognised process, made up of several stages (see the diagram below). I found this idea captivating because of its openness and flexibility. Each stage has value in itself, whether or not it leads to the next.

So, when I first saw the projector working in the new hall, my immediate reaction was, "Ooh, we could show films!"

The first film we showed, shortly after reopening in December 2024, was the Christmas classic *It's a Wonderful Life*. It may just be me, but in these difficult times I find the occasional escape into films from bygone eras deeply comforting, and this was a perfect example.



Last winter I showed a series of four feel-good musical films in the hope of bringing some comfort to others who might feel the same. We gradually built a small but appreciative audience. This reflects the first two stages of the Fresh Expressions journey.

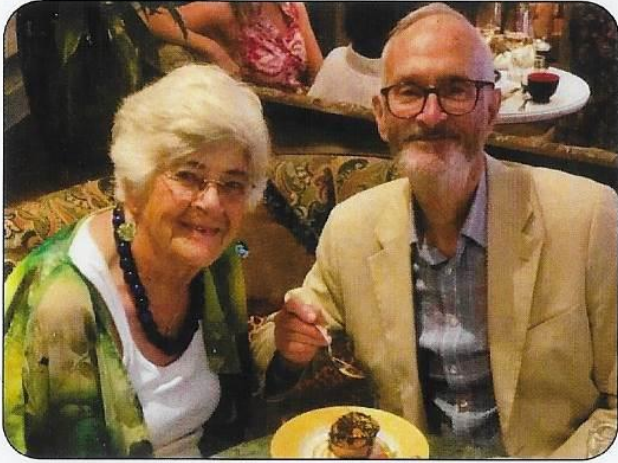
Since then, I have tried to nurture this budding community by continuing Feel-Good Sunday Afternoons. During the late spring and summer we have offered games and conversation instead of films, although these have been less successful. Even so, I am not discouraged, and the films will return in September.

Whether this endeavour will eventually develop into a Fresh Expression of Church, only time will tell. But nothing ventured, nothing gained. Even if we never reach the stage of exploring discipleship or becoming a recognised church community, we will still have offered comfort, companionship and welcome to people who may find life lonely or difficult.

If you'd like to learn more about Fresh Expressions of Church, visit the [Fresh Expressions](#) section of the United Reformed Church website. And perhaps the question remains for all of us: **Can you think of another way to begin a Fresh Expression connected with our church?**



Let's Meet...Ginny Allkins



Virginia, now well known to Homewood Church as Ginny, was the second born in a family of five. After her school days, at 18 Ginny commenced nurse training at the Middlesex Hospital in London. All students were required to 'live in' in nurse accommodation in hospital grounds. After three years' General training all nurses were required to spend one year as a Staff Nurse in the wards. After this, Ginny decided to do Part 1 Midwifery training in Cambridge. After completing this training she worked in private London Hospitals, including caring for Heart Surgery patients.

It was then that she saw a poster advert in Oxford Street wanting nurses to work in New York for a year. She thought that the adventure would be good for her so applied. Once there she was very warmly welcomed because of her excellent training and experience and was sent to a private hospital in Brooklyn where the terminal care of patients was undertaken. However, in Ginny's eyes the standard of care given to the patients was not up to scratch so she returned to the organisation who employed her to ask to be sent another area. After much discussion they agreed and she was sent to Manhattan teaching hospital. In Manhattan she rented a small apartment and had a cat she named Tabitha.

In the USA she could have taken their Nursing Degree which would have allowed her to stay permanently but as she had declined this course she was required to leave the USA after one year so she returned to her parent's home in Marylebone. Once there she rejoined St. Marylebone Church and the Alpha group. The Alpha Group was for young people in their 20s, taking part in discussion groups and educational trips to various residential homes where they chatted and entertained the residents. It was there that she met Alan Allkins who was later to become her husband.

In 1968 she and Alan were married and lived in Wembley Park for four years where Alan taught English and Drama at Haberdashers Askes School. A year after their marriage, Ginny started her Health Visitor training which she thoroughly enjoyed. In 1972, by which time they had a seven-month-old baby, they moved to St Albans, where they joined St. Michaels Church, which they then attended for 40 years. Ginny resumed her Health Visiting role part-time, attached to a GP practice in Hatfield Rd. and a clinic in PHC. The liaison between her, the hospital and community gave her great pleasure. She was then head hunted to teach Nursery Nursing Students at St. Albans City College about Child Health diseases and the development of the child, where she remained for 15 years.

While teaching at St Albans City College Ginny decided to undertake studying for a Diploma in Psychodynamic Counselling. After gaining the Diploma she then took a Counselling roll at the Maltings Surgery, finally retiring in 2002.

Her lifelong Christian belief and faith in God had been influenced by her maternal grandmother, Mary Leach. In 1885 both Mary's parents had died when she was 10 but she had been sent to Canada and brought up by a Methodist Minister. She studied at Toronto Bible College then went to India as a Missionary. There she married an Army Officer and later gave birth to 2 children. One

was Alice, who was to become Ginny's mother. As an adult, Alice moved back to England to complete a Law Degree, where she met Ginny's father - also a lawyer.

In 2012 Ginny and her husband downsized to the flat she is now living in. No longer car driving, and Homewood Church being in walking distance, they decided to start attending Homewood Church where they were given a very kind and warm welcome. Very sadly Alan died in December 2024.

After a very active and caring life Ginny now enjoys spending time with her family, who are very important to her, reading, occasionally making jam but also chatting and meeting new people.
Maggie Snyder

Origins...by Philip Nixon

To the north of Stoke-on-Trent the land rises towards the Pennines. This is millstone grit country, with coal seams outcropping on or near to the surface, so for several hundred years there have been small scale "drift" mines, that is, mines that don't have a shaft but which follow the coal



Photo above: "Every man should be able to sit under his own olive tree and drink his own mint tea in peace".

seams in from the surface. These mines fed the growing industries in the Potteries to the south. Nearby are iron stone deposits so iron works also developed.

This is the area in which I grew up, in one of a straggle of mining villages that climb towards the local hill, Mow Cop, which just reaches 1000ft and is crowned with a mock castle, built in the eighteenth century by a wealthy local family to make it look more scenic. Despite the history of coal mining, much of the area is still rural, with small farms amidst the villages. Although the coal waste heaps have mostly disappeared now, the disturbance is still there beneath the surface, and it is a foolish builder who does not have the land surveyed for abandoned shafts before he begins work

My father's family were local builders, originating from Biddulph Moor, an area of high ground further into the Pennines. This is the head waters of the river Trent and, at one time, one of my relatives owned the land that has a small spring which is given the accolade of being the source, although there are, of course

many brooks that run down into Knypersley Reservoir which can truly be considered the beginning of the Trent.

Although the Nixons gave me my name, my mother's family had more influence on my childhood. The Youngs were from farming stock, originally in Cheshire, and I was brought up closely connected to my grandfather's farm. His father was born into a well-to-do Cheshire family and as a young man he was set up on his own farm. Sadly, he was too fond of alcohol and within a few years he was bankrupt. The farm was sold but the entire stock of animals was transferred by train to a rented farm in Herefordshire (which I have visited). However, things went no better and by the time that my grandfather was a young man this farm also had also failed. Grandfather then moved to the Potteries (where there were some relatives) in search of work and eventually took on the tenancy of a farm on the outskirts of Tunstall, the most northerly of the six towns that make up Stoke-on-Trent. Like many farmers he did well out of the 1st World War and he married and had a growing family.

However, then tragedy struck. His young wife died in childbirth with their fourth child, leaving him with a farm to run and four children, one a newborn. The saviour was an unmarried cousin, back in the Cheshire family and one of six unmarried sisters. She became his second wife, the baby was fostered to another relative and, as she had some money, together they bought the farm where I was brought up. It was a 70acre dairy farm with about 30 milking cows, a few miles further out from Tunstall but they retained their milk customers and once they left school my mother and her elder sister delivered the milk, at first by pony and trap and later in a motor van. Neither of them ever took a driving test!

The farmhouse, probably Edwardian, is (it still stands) quite an imposing building but by today's standards the accommodation was pretty spartan. Even in my memory (early fifties) lighting was by gas mantle, cooking was on a coal fired range and the outside privy was emptied once a week by the night soil men. I particularly remember that what passed for toilet paper was torn up pages of the "Farmer and Stockbreeder", a glossy publication quite unsuited to this secondary use. However, grandfather was, I believe, a happy and fulfilled man. He once again owned his own farm and was doing what he had been born to. I understand that the great-grandfather, who lived to a considerable age despite the alcohol, lived with them and still got very drunk when he could. He was then reputed to sit with a shot gun across his knee, unloaded I hope.

My parents married in June 1940, precipitated perhaps by the threat of invasion. Family folklore says that they walked to church carrying their gas masks. Perhaps, but in the photographs they and the guests look pretty smartly dressed.

During the war my parents rented a small cottage half a mile or so up the hill but at the end of the war my father and his brothers built a detached house a hundred yards or so away from the farmhouse and this is where I grew up. I was an only child but was surrounded by uncles, aunts and cousins, mostly within walking distance. Moreover, I and my friends had the run of 70 acres of farm, including a very unsanitary duckpond which inevitably became our favourite playing place. The southern boundary to the farm was a single track mineral railway carrying coal from a local colliery to a gas works. This was also, of course, a favourite playground and occasionally we would even get a ride on the footplate.

My grandfather never became reconciled to motors and so throughout my childhood draught horses were the means of pulling anything. He mostly had a pair. They were not really worked very hard and so had clear ideas of how much they could be expected to pull. If, in haymaking, too much was loaded on the cart they would stand stock still until they judged the weight to be what was reasonable.

Haymaking was the time for family get together. It seemed to go on all summer. In particular, I had three girl cousins who had been "exiled" to London by their father's work and they would return for the summer holidays and the haymaking. Apparently I was very bad tempered at having to give up my bedroom for these visitors! Although the farm was best suited to dairy, during the war grandfather was directed to grow such arable crops as would survive there. This persisted for some time after the war so I remember potatoes and oats being grown.



(Photo: Philip is the smallest child, fifth from left)

Not having the machinery, my grandfather broadcast the seed by hand as he had been taught as a child. In retrospect I was privileged to have experienced a way of life that was outdated even then. Of course, at the time you simply accept it as normal.

The religious lives of our villages revolved around either the CofE church or the Methodist chapels. Our family were definitely church, an uncle being the organist and my parents meeting through the church. However, the chapels were more interesting as each village had both a Wesleyan and a Primitive Methodist chapel. The Prims were strong locally as they had been born out of a 19th C revival movement which had begun with open air meetings on the slopes of Mow Cop. Primitive Methodist chapel no1 is situated in Mow Cop village.

Another feature of the local villages were the *fustians*. These were small mills in which velvet was made by young women who cut the loops of the fabric to give the softness of velvet. They offered a useful employment for the local women whose menfolk often worked in the mines. Why they were so prevalent in our villages is not clear except that the bigger textile towns of Leek and Congleton were not far away.

As I grew up ties with the farm inevitably weakened. Grammar school was seven miles and two bus rides away and then university in London. Emotional ties have never gone away though and, courtesy of the retirement bungalow that my parents built and which we still own, we still visit every few weeks and enjoy a treat of filled Staffordshire oatcakes.

Early Farewell!



Nick and Alison Buckley and Nick Brown were presented with gift tokens after the morning service on Sunday, 28th June. This was to thank them for the parts they have played at St Albans URC and, before the merger, Trinity, over very many years. Nick and Alison are going to Edinburgh and Nick Brown is moving to Sussex. Both Nicks thanked the churches for their gifts and Nick Brown also pointed out the important contribution of his late wife, Janet.



May God be a bright flame before you
be a guiding star above you
be a smooth path below you
be a kindly shepherd behind you
today, tomorrow and for ever.
Amen



David Mooney of our Green Team attended three “Green” events in June. Here is his report.

On 10th June I attended the National Emergency Briefing at Greenwood. The film is an evidence-led initiative launched by UK climate campaigners and scientists to demand a wartime-scale governmental response to the climate and nature crisis. It was initially presented to cross-party politicians then transitioned to a public film release. It warned that the UK is facing extreme weather, systemic breakdown, nature loss, societal threats and economic shocks. Its message is that solutions are available and make good economic sense and strongly recommends that there should be a National Televised emergency briefing and a radical science-led National Emergency Response. I found the film equally shocking and encouraging.



Bee garden with special bee sculptures across the road from Amersham Free Church

On Saturday 13th June I went to Amersham Free Church with a good-sized contingent from St Albans URC for the URC Thames North Synod Green Day. It was a fun day with an impressive talk by the organisers of Amersham in Bloom, workshops (I attended a workshop on energy savings), a walk through woods and gardens and a Q&A. There was a good opportunity to talk to people from other churches and to renew contacts made at previous events. A lovely sunny day added to the enjoyment of this sociable day out.

On Monday 15th June I watched a film at the Odyssey Cinema in St Albans called ‘Power Station’. The film follows the turbulent journey of two artist-activists on a mission to turn their London street into a community-owned, green energy powerhouse. They set out to install solar panels on every single house along their terraced street in Walthamstow. By various eccentric means they raise £400,000 to convert 20 residential homes and 5 local schools to solar power. The meeting was followed by a question-and-answer session with Alban Community Energy (<https://albancommunityenergy.org>) who aim to create a community energy project here in St Albans. They are aiming to enlist investors and sites (residential and commercial, and public) with the aim of installing panels to reduce the hosts’ energy costs and generate funds for community projects. I will go on their mailing list to gain more information. We would, of course, need evidence that this approach has tangible benefits over our own carbon and energy saving approach.

If you would like more information about any of these topics, please talk to David or any of the Green Team.



A rose from Homewood’s garden



Greenwood’s wild flower garden.

News Roundup by Anne Goldsmith

1. Looking back to Spring Strollers



In March the Strollers experienced all four seasons in one morning – sun, rain, wind and hail! But that didn't deter the hardy strollers. Janet and Keith led the group in a beautiful country walk around Essenden, ending with a pub lunch at The Candlestick.

In April, David and Elizabeth Martin led the walk from Redbourn, along the disused railway line called the Nickey Line. The bluebells were admired by all the walkers, and the morning finished with a meal at the Holly Bush.



The May Strollers walk around Highfield was organised by Helen M, and lunch was had at the Speckled Hen.

And for the June London walk, Jonathan Kiek led a rather damp group around Lambeth and Westminster. However, it was very enjoyable and informative.



News Roundup

2. Easter Fun

Easter Fun took place on the morning of Thursday 2nd April. Approximately 35 children, accompanied by parents and carers enjoyed the great variety of activities on offer. Songs and a prayer were shared in the church at the end of the session. Money was raised for the local Food Bank. We are most grateful to the dedicated group of helpers as well as the other adults and children.



Maundy Thursday Meal and Service and Easter

Fiona Smith and Gill Elliott led the thoughtful and spiritual Maundy Thursday communion service. Special thanks must go to Jenny Graham and the catering team.

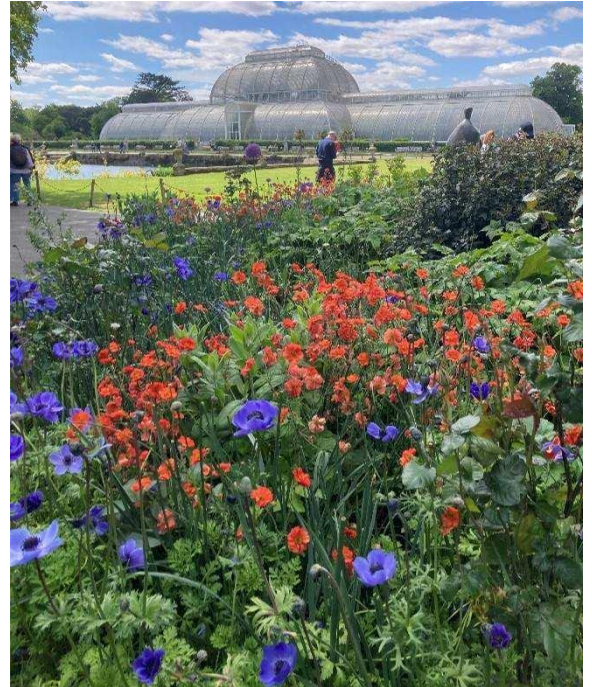


Cross decorated with
flowers and butterflies
on
Easter Day.





A group of about 40 of us had a wonderful trip to Kew Gardens. We thoroughly enjoyed the colours, smells, sights and sounds. Some of us braved the Treetop Walk, and the Rhododendron Dell was magnificent. We even enjoyed close-ups with foxes, geese and goslings. Thanks to Ray for your tremendous organising of a great trip once again.



A friendly fox



One of the many ancient majestic trees

Spectacular Rhododendron Dell



On Saturday 16th May, Churches Together in Marshalswick organised the annual Christian Aid Fair outside St Mary's Church. The weather was kind to us and there were a variety of stalls, music and refreshments. More than £2,000 was raised in total, and our book stall raised about £200 of it. Many thanks to Helen G and all the helpers.

On the evening of Saturday 20th June Homewood Singers performed at a concert in aid of St Albans MENCAP and Trinity Community Project, who use the church building for their day centre on several days each week. The concert was very well attended, the singers performed excellently, and Malcolm Scott's sing-along organ playing was greatly enjoyed. The fabulous total of £1,348.10 was raised from donations, gift aid, the sale of trinkets and raffle tickets. Many thanks to all involved.



Alban Pilgrimage

Churches from around St Albans took part in the annual Alban Parade from St Peter's Church to the Cathedral. Our church was well represented at the Pilgrimage. The church banner was carried by Gill and admired by many.



Ethics girl: AI – yes or no? by Gill Elliott

AI is everywhere! Should we be embracing it or rejecting it?

I started by ignoring my principles and asking AI for 200 words on why we should not be using it! While I could not disagree with what it wrote, I still think it did not give the whole picture. It did mention a lack of originality – which makes sense, as all it is doing is regurgitating words and ideas that it has found on the Internet. It also mentioned a risk of inaccurate information; again, because much of what is on the internet is inaccurate and biased it will repeat that, which can affect how people, issues or groups are represented. But worse is that it also makes things up, so if you use it, you must check what it has written extremely carefully. And never ever use it for something critical such as a legal case: (it has been done; it did not end well). There are also ethical concerns as to whether students should be using it to write essays, or researchers to write papers. If people start relying on AI to write for them, might writing skills eventually die out?



Image of a data centre in the State of Georgia, USA, with the flag of the country of Georgia, Europe. Someone should have checked!

Leaving aside the content generated by AI, there are now huge concerns about the data centres needed by AI programs. A data centre is a huge building (the largest is 7.2 million ft² - about the size of Disneyland) containing lots of very powerful computers. Some are very necessary for applications such as medical or Government databases, but the sheer number – nearly 12,000 worldwide, a number which continues to grow - is concerning. These buildings consume a lot of electricity (a single medium-sized AI data centre consumes electricity equivalent to approximately 100,000 households). They generate a lot of noise and heat, (they raise nearby air temperatures between 2° and 9° C) which means they need a lot of fresh water for cooling- a single large facility can consume up to 5 million gallons daily. They use a huge amount of electricity; Meta (FaceBook, WhatsApp, Instagram) just partnered with a nuclear startup to build eight reactors to power its

data centres.

These numbers are mind-boggling. What do they mean for us? Mainly that every time we use AI for a query or to write an article, we are using resources. Every picture generated by AI not only takes creativity away from a person; it costs ½ to 2 litres of water and 1.35 kWh of electricity – roughly equivalent to charging a phone 2 to 3 times.

To conclude: Yes, AI can be incredibly useful. It's increasingly hard to avoid using it, as it's bundled with Word and in most search engines (if you want to avoid it then you could try switching to DuckDuckGo). But think hard about the environmental impact before you use it, and please, please always check what it's told you!

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HAPPY 60th BIRTHDAY

to Alyson!

(Alyson is pictured singing with long-term friend Claire)



Spinalonga – a place of suffering

by Jenny Hill

Our recent holiday in Crete was in Plaka, the small village opposite Spinalonga, an island that became a colony for the enforced isolation of leprosy sufferers. The colony was established by the Cretan state, and ran from 1903 to 1957.

We took a tourist boat to visit the island. We stepped off the boat to queue in the heat and pay 20 euros each. With at least 1000 visitors a day, it's generating a good income. They have done a lot of restoration - sad that it couldn't benefit the leprosy sufferers.

We walked through the tunnel, a reminder of the newcomers' first steps into a life of enforced isolation. It had been called Dante's Gate, a dark arched tunnel in the Venetian fortress walls. In the early days the patients were bound in chains and treated as offenders, sent to the island to deal with their sickness alone without medication or comfort. A report in a Greek newspaper in 1915 read: "It looks more like a criminal facility but with no cure or freedom."



One sufferer wrote. "I have lived on Spinalonga with many lepers because the doctors said our disease was infectious. They also said that the leper might infect you with the eyes." The doctors and nurses all left before sundown, locking the large gate of the Venetian fortress. (Before leaving they had to be disinfected. We saw one of the huge cylinders that heated the boiling water and sulphur.)

The patient continued. "We went to the church of St. Panteleimon and prayed in silence. We all needed the presence of a priest to comfort us with the words of the Lord. One day we were sitting in a cafeteria and a priest appeared. He greeted each one of us with a handshake. At the end of Mass we were given the Holy bread with his hands, and at the end of Communion he drank what was left in the chalice. We were so surprised tears of joy sprung from our eyes." The priest stayed to support them for many years.

In the 1930's a young man, Remountakis, who had a diploma in law, was sent to Spinalonga. When he arrived, his sister welcomed him saying "come" and not "welcome". This is how patients greeted newcomers. He wrote an autobiography - sharing life with the disease and the feeling of social exclusion. He fought to improve life and living conditions and the treatment from the state. He founded the Fraternity of Patients of Spinalonga.



He brought whitewash to disinfect houses and planted trees. An electric generator was purchased and the island had electrical power even before Plaka. He set up cleaning services, a cafeteria and a barber shop. People were encouraged to use their professions. They started a theatre and cinema and played classical music in the streets. A school opened and a kind of trade was established. The most important achievement was the strengthening of people's solidarity.

The State issued a monthly benefit to each patient. The supplies taken over created an income for poor local people and doctors and nurses were offered good pay. At last, in 1948, patients could be given the new antibiotics, which gave impressive healing results. Patients began to be cured and were given discharge permits to return to their homes. A lady

who wrote the date she left on her front door was the last to leave in June 1957. The front door has been kept with other displays.

We were glad to get back on the boat and return to Plaka.

(Ed: For a good novel about Spinalonga, try 'The Island' by Victoria Hislop. Recommended by the Homewood Book Group as well!)

St Albans URC Preaching Plan 2026 v1.6

Date		At Homewood Road morning 10.30 unless otherwise shown.	At Greenwood	At Homewood Road - Evening/Afternoon 18.30 unless shown
Jul	5	Rev'd Simon Carver (HC)	Stephen De Silva	Rev'd Naomi Young-Rodas
	12	Rev'd 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	Rev'd John Steele
Aug	2	Rev'd Dawn Savidge (HC)	Harry Smith	Fiona Smith
	9	Rev'd Naomi Young-Rodas	Gill Elliott	Gill Elliott
	16	Karen Campbell	Rev'd Naomi Young-Rodas	Mike Findley (HC)
	23	Worship Group	Cameron Varley	Rev'd John Steele
	30	Harry Smith	joint at Homewood	Jackie Wilson
Sep	6	Rev'd Naomi Young-Rodas (HC)	Rev'd John Churcher	Harry Smith
	13		David Jonathan	Hilary & Philip
	20	Harvest - Worship Group	Rev'd Naomi Young-Rodas	Rev'd Jenny Mills
	27	Stephen Poxon	Cathy Williamson	
Oct	4	Rev'd Naomi Young-Rodas (HC)	Worship Group	
	11	Commitment for Life - Worship Group	Rev'd John Steele	
	18	Parade Sunday - Geoff Sutton	Mike Bramwell	Gill Elliott (HC)
	25	Homewood Singers	Bob Little	
Nov	1	Rev'd Naomi Young-Rodas (HC)	Valerie Chapman	
	8	Remembrance Service - Worship Group	Sheila Knopp	
	15	Mary Arthur	Rev'd Naomi Young-Rodas	Rev'd John Steele (HC)
	22	Karen Campbell	Mike Findley	
	29	Kirk Service - First in Advent. Martyn MacPhee	joint at Homewood	
Dec	6	Rev'd Simon Carver (HC)	Rev'd Naomi Young-Rodas	
	13	Worship Group	Gill Elliott	Martyn MacPhee (HC)
	20	Rev'd Naomi Young-Rodas	Greenwood Carol Service	Homewood Singers Carol Service
	24			Ray Fraser (11:30 pm)
	25	Christmas Day - Rev'd Naomi Young-Rodas 10.30 am	Greenwood at home	
	27	Harry Smith		

Minister: Rev'd Naomi Young-Rodas
Email: revnaomi@yahoo.com
Tel: 07555 705530

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

