



# st JOHN'S

*Living God's Love*

Parish Magazine

SUMMER 2018



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*Living God's Love*

Harvest 2018  
in this issue

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Letter from the Vicarage **5**  
by the Reverend Nicholas Anderson

Churchwardens' report 2017–18 **9**  
by James Hillman and  
Mary Jean Pritchard

Parish registers **11**  
Prayer for healing **21**  
Foraging for God **17**  
Mothers' Union **19**  
Getting to know the congregation **21**  
Food for thought **23**  
The heart of faith **25**  
Man cannot live by bread alone **27**  
Project Phoenix **31**  
Forthcoming events **33**

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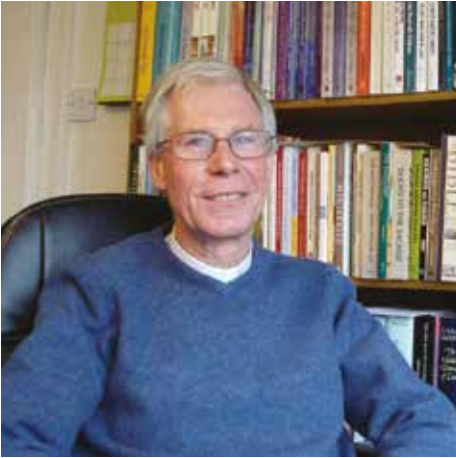
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## Letter from the Vicarage by the Reverend Nicholas Anderson

**D**uring Lent this year a small group of our congregation gathered round a simple lunch of bread and soup each Thursday. While we did this our conversation led to food poverty in the light of the Gospel and our faith. The evil of food poverty blights the lives of so many in our world, and even here in seemingly affluent Harpenden most churches and supermarkets have baskets collecting food for those who have fallen on hard times. In our services this summer we will read through chapter six of John's gospel, which gives us an opportunity to focus on the connections between the Eucharist and food poverty. More than this we will be sharing meals and hearing about the justice issues around food. You are all invited: do see the series plan for these events on page 15. You will find that much of this magazine is based on the connections between food and faith.

The issues of food poverty are hardly new. The Scriptures are full of references to food, food with a purpose. In the paradigm of Eden, it was as early as the third day when God created 'every kind of vegetation and fruit trees, enticing to look at and good to eat, and saw that it was good'. (c.f. Gn.1:12). There are numerous other references, too, to the goodness of food. Indeed, the Scriptures seem to suggest that one of the signs of the Covenant between God is the abundance and beauty of food.

This is the point, really. God gives us the goodness and the abundance of the world's food, and that is integral to God's covenant with us. By making creation beautiful and fruitful, God shows that God's intentions are good in creating us. In God's love we are sustained and nourished through the goodness and abundance of food. Therefore issues of food poverty break the Covenant, bringing God's name into disrepute and going against the will of God. The covenant is being undermined by the very people to whom God has entrusted the goodness of creation.

Before the Chosen People had entered into the Promised Land, a land flowing with milk and honey, God provided them with nourishment in the wilderness, a place

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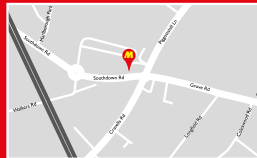
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normally associated with food poverty. Later, the covenant established with Moses as normative for life in the Promised Land is clear:

‘when you gather the harvest of your land, you are not to harvest to the very end of the field. You are neither to strip your vine bare nor to collect the fruit that has fallen in your vineyard. You must leave them for the poor and for the stranger. I am the Lord your God.’ (Lev 19:9-10)

We too, like those ancient societies, have our own poor and strangers: the trafficked; the runaways; the migrants; the desperate; the marginalised; the broken.

When the Messiah came establishing a new covenant, the issue of food poverty became even more explicit and insistent. ‘Happy are the hungry now, you shall have your fill’, (Lk 6:20) Jesus says in His manifesto, the *Beatitudes*, adding, ‘alas, for you who have your fill now; you shall go hungry’ (Lk 6:24). Those here who have their fill now will go hungry because they are not doing as they should, which is to ensure that God’s will of plenty for all is being done. Jesus’ miracles of loaves and fish also references forms of food poverty. Rather than let those vast congregations faint as they go home, he transforms five loaves and two fish into a meal for more than 5,000 (Mt.14:13ff) and again, in a second transformation, a meal for more than 4,000 (Mt.15:32). There are even baskets left over, which he insists aren’t to go to waste.

Food poverty is an affront to God and to our common humanity. To meet and heal our shared poverty, Christ Jesus demonstrates God’s solidarity with the poor by being born into poverty, and follows this up by making himself into our food: ‘my flesh is real food’ and ‘my blood is real drink’ (Jn 6:55). This lifts us up to the divine life. All people are made in the image and likeness of God, and have an eternal destiny, especially since, with the messianic age, Christ is one with us irrevocably and is encountered in each of us. For ‘when I was hungry you gave me food’, he says on Judgement Day to the bewildered virtuous about to inherit eternal life for, insofar as ‘you did this to the least of these, you did it to me’ (Mt.25:35,40). This is what Mother Teresa of Calcutta called the ‘five-finger Gospel’:

‘you did it to me; five words which sum up the Gospel in its entirety.

The Gospel is thus a living document, breathing the Spirit of God; it impels us who love it to put it into practice, whilst it shows those around us that this is what we are about because of the Gospel. It is about the fullness of God’s love lived among those who love God, seeking to do His will for us all.’

It is imperative that the wound of food poverty be healed, because if we do not love in a practical way, the future of the world is impaired and the life of believers is diminished.

...

Do join us for our services and activities this summer as we think more about this most divine and human of issues.

With kind regards,  
Nicholas Anderson

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# Churchwardens report 2017/18

**A**s churchwardens we are required to provide a report to the APCM which summarises the main activities at St John's during the past year. We would like to begin by thanking our deputy warden, Jane Donati, for her support to us.

We are also grateful to the other members of the Standing Committee, Emma Bresslaw, our secretary, and Steve Creasy, our treasurer. Emma keeps meticulous records of all the essential administration of the PCC, takes minutes and ensures that our meetings are run according to the often complex rules of the Church of England.

Steve has once again this year carried out the duties and responsibilities of treasurer efficiently and professionally, managing our budgets, accounts and finances and dealing with our day-to-day accounting procedures. It is a considerable task and he undertakes it willingly and with characteristic attention to detail and utter competence. The way in which he presents the accounts is always clear and understandable. We must also thank Tony Armstrong, who is our Stewardship Recorder, as well as counting, recording and banking our collections each week.

We have always considered it important to maintain the delivery of our parish magazine free of charge to all in the parish, reaching about 4,000 households. Our thanks go to Anthony Armstrong for taking on the responsibility of editing the magazine, and Steve Whiting, who ensures the magazine is distributed to the team of co-ordinators and then to those who deliver. We are grateful to you all.

A new group of parents has now taken

over the running of Junior Church, and we are grateful for the time that they have taken to plan sessions, teach, look after, and entertain the younger members of our congregation over the year.

We launched our new website, [www.stjohnsharpenden.org.uk](http://www.stjohnsharpenden.org.uk) at the end of the year. This has been put together after a great deal of hard work by our communications team, presenting a refreshed and updated perspective of our life as a church and in our community. Our thanks go to all who have been involved in developing and maintaining our website, particularly Neil Middleton.

Nicholas has continued to give us his time patiently and tirelessly, supporting all that we do as churchwardens and ensuring that all the work of the parish is underpinned by prayer. We are fortunate to have the ready support of Mary Monk and Julia White, who have periodically come out of retirement to assist and lead us in our worship.

In the summer we were thrilled to welcome James Brown as our Curate. We have benefitted hugely from the fresh outlook that he has brought to us, both in our worship and in our ministry in the wider community.

We were pleased to learn that David Halsey will take up an appointment as Curate at St Luke's Church in St Albans later this year; he, Celia and their family will go with our congratulations and prayers for this stage of his training and ministry. Our Readers, David Nye (permission to officiate) and Lauryn Awbrey, continue to offer support to Nicholas.

We were delighted when Emma

Bresslaw was licensed by the bishop as a Lay Leader of Worship. Emma is now a member of the ministerial team here, assisting with All-Age worship, leading Evensong on Sundays and in the daily services of morning and evening prayer.

Our Christmas celebrations were typically memorable: St John's was represented at the Southdown Lights-up celebrations; among other activities, we held an evening of beer and carols in *The Engineer* pub; the Junior Church led our worship with their nativity play at the all-age service in the middle of December and the choir led our service of nine lessons and carols; and we had a large turnout on Christmas Eve for our annual children's 'Walking to Bethlehem' nativity from the green in Southdown to St John's. Particular thanks are due to the landlord of *The Carpenter's Arms*, Tony, who provided generous and much-needed refreshment in preparation for the walk up the hill!

We are very fortunate that music at St John's is of such a high standard as it makes a great contribution to our worship. The more regular introduction of an 'augmented choir' at certain of our All-Age Eucharists has shown off the musical talents of additional members of our congregation.

In February, Nicholas and a number of members of the congregation visited the Holy Land on a visit organised through Embrace, one of our chosen charities. Together with a group from Deddington Oxfordshire, they visited many of the holy sites and also learnt about the work of Embrace in the region. Eucharists held in the Garden of Gethsemane and by the Sea of Galilee were particular highlights.

On the social side, we held a cheese

and wine evening in late September, at which we were entertained both by Emma McGrath, a local singer, and by James Brown. James presented another evening of songs and music earlier this year. We are grateful to the committee who put this together, particularly Jackie Dodd and Steve Whiting.

The very popular Tea at Three, which takes place in the hall once a month, continues to provide companionship, refreshment and entertainment to older members of the wider community. At the pre-Christmas event, children from the Grove School choir provided after-tea entertainment which was much appreciated by all. Again, we are grateful to the volunteers who collect and bring people each month, bake cakes, entertain, wash up, etc., all under the leadership of Margaret Creighton.

Over the course of the year we have continued our work towards developing a new parish centre. Our appointed architects produced a feasibility study, the results of which were presented to the PCC and the congregation during the year. We have agreed to advance one particular option towards a planning application, hopefully later this year. This is being taken forward by a small but dedicated steering group led by Paul Jessop. The challenge associated with fundraising will be a key focus over the next year. We continue to seek God's guidance on how we can use our facilities to further our mission in the parish.

Alongside the exciting, future-focused activities, the day-to-day work of the parish continues. The church and the existing hall require ongoing maintenance,

and we are fortunate to have a team of dedicated individuals who take pride in our splendid building and in the maintenance and repair of our hall and grounds. We are particularly grateful to David Christian and the members of the Fabric Committee and to John Jones, who responds to many emergency calls in relation to the hall.

We are pleased that we have been able to maintain our Outside Giving at 10% of our income. This year we have supported Embrace, Christian Aid, the Church Urban Fund and the St Albans and District Food Bank. Cash collections over the year have gone to the Bishop's Harvest Appeal and our Christmas collections were given, as

usual, to Crisis. Our thanks to all who continue to contribute items to the Food Bank and to those who deliver them on a regular basis.

Our annual report gives us the opportunity to thank everyone for their support in sharing with us the work of caring for and maintaining the continuing work of St John's. Please be assured that we are most appreciative of all the support we have received over this past year. Whether or not we have mentioned you by name in this report, we know who you are and we thank you!

Mary Jean Pritchard  
James Hillman

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## Parish registers

### Baptisms

*Welcome to the family of God*

14 April 2018

Tobias O'Brien

### Marriages

*Joined by God*

There were no weddings

Funerals in Church

*May they rest in peace*

5 February 2018

John William Frederick Farr

23 February 2018

Ronald Moss

28 February 2018

Joyce Watson

5 April 2018

James Bruce Morton

(known as Bruce)

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## Prayer for healing

Healing God, hear our prayer for the sick – all who are in pain, waiting for or recovering from surgery, undergoing long-term treatment, battling against disease, anxious about the future. Support them through family and friends, through the skill and dedication of medical staff, and, above all, through the knowledge of your everlasting love. Minister your healing touch, and grant them the peace and strength they need to find wholeness in you. (Nick Fawcett in *Prayers for Healing*, Kevin Mayhew, 2013)

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# All Age Services

Specially designed services that are suitable for all,  
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a child friendly talk and communion service

## Sun 6<sup>th</sup> May - Thy Kingdom Come

Making bracelets to help us share good news with people

## Sun 3<sup>rd</sup> June - Keep Calm it's Sabbath

How do we live with a healthy balance of work, play and wonder?

## Sun 1<sup>st</sup> July - Communion / BBQ

Our curate James' first Eucharist celebration followed by a BBQ

## Sun 9<sup>th</sup> September - Education Sunday

A fun focus on education at the start of the school year

## Sun 7<sup>th</sup> October - Harvest Festival

Think about God and food with a special visit from a local farmer

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# Junior Church

## All welcome

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# Cultivate

ARTS FESTIVAL

**Thursday 21<sup>st</sup> - Sunday 24<sup>th</sup> June**

Across Harpenden, different churches are hosting exciting arts events and exhibitions.

The church building at St John's, AL5 1DJ will be transformed with an ambitious art installation on the theme of the environment and our effect on it, both good and bad.

This will be open each day from 9am - 7pm and will be host to the following stimulating events.

All free!

[www.cultivate.me.uk](http://www.cultivate.me.uk)

[www.stjohnsharpenden.org.uk/church-life/artsfestival](http://www.stjohnsharpenden.org.uk/church-life/artsfestival)

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## **Programme of events at St John's church, AL5 1DJ**

### **Thursday 21<sup>st</sup> June**

#### **8pm - 9pm - Words and Wine**

A mixture of spoken word pieces, ancient and new, original and chosen, poetry and prose. Reflections on the art installation within St John's, which explores themes of the environment and our place within it. Complimentary wine.

### **Saturday 23<sup>rd</sup> June**

#### **10.30am - 11.15am - Coffee Concert - *Mighty Oaks from Little Acorns Grow***

St John's Director of Music, Roger Carter plays organ music inspired by the installation, with themes of nature, new beginnings and growth.

#### **4pm - 5pm - Why Bother with the Environment?**

Mark Prina (Reserve Manager at A Rocha's Foxearth Meadows) talks about the work of conservation charity *A Rocha*, what can be done to conserve the wildlife of our beautiful planet, and why we should care in the first place.

#### **8pm - 9.30pm - In Tune with Nature – an evening of songs**

Singer-songwriter and curate of St John's, James Christie Brown is joined by Lee Abbey Community artist in residence, Abigail-Joy Bowen. They reflect on the theme of the festival with their own compositions within the beautiful acoustic of the church. Complimentary wine.

### **Sunday 24<sup>th</sup> June**

#### **9.30am - 10.30am - Patronal Festival**

On St John's Day, the church celebrates its patron, John the Baptist. Special guest speaker, Simon Brown, of conservation charity *A Rocha*, draws together the themes of John the Baptist and a Christian response to the environment.

#### **4pm - 5.30pm - A Walk in the Woods**

An expert from Majestic Trees, Flamstead takes us on an insightful tour of the trees of St John's wood, opposite the church. We end up in the art installation in the church to consider spiritual insights we can learn from trees. Suitable for all ages and dogs also welcome.

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# Foraging for God



**F**ood and faith are strongly linked. I think this is because God and eating are both fundamental to being a human. They are both things we have personal preferences and habits about, things we experience, and things that shape and are shaped by culture.

One part of my own relationship with food is that I enjoy foraging; that is, finding food in the wild. Most of have had the simple of pleasure of juice stained fingers as we pick sun warmed blackberries, but there is a great deal more we can feast on that grows all around us. From samphire to cowslip, hazel nuts to nettles, borage to bear's garlic there is an abundance of wild food out there.

Foraging and gathering used to be humanity's main means of getting food. Far back in our species' history, each season would provide its own specialities; there was natural variation and rapid feedback on over-harvesting. This was the way of life for all until the revolutionary practice of farming began in the Middle East around 10,000 years ago.

The way people get their food connects with the way they understood God. The food gatherer would have seen God

in nature as provider and companion; in harmony with it just as they themselves were. The farmer, however, was not in nature so much as trying to control it. They would hope that their God would control and dominate the elements too. You would pray for rain, you would ask God to control the swarms of pests. There would also be a different understanding of the seasons. You would feel blessed at some times and seemingly cursed at others. This may have made you unsure of whether this powerful God outside of nature was punishing them? Was God to be appeased?

The imagery of the Garden of Eden is full of a friendly, foraging feel; a plentiful, natural relationship between humanity and food as they walked in the garden:

I give you every seed bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food. (Gen 1.29)

But one of the punishments as they left this era was, of course, agricultural:

Cursed is the ground because of you: through painful toil you will eat of it all the days of your life. It will produce thorns and thistles for you, and you will eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your brow you will eat food until you return to the ground. (Gen 3.17-19)

Even for the writers of the creation stories, agriculture and foraging culture had spiritual implications.

And what of today? Although many of us individually know the joy of growing

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our own small amounts of food, or indeed of finding it in the wild, we are more disconnected from our food production than ever. Our understanding of food production is that it is out of sight and knowledge, distant and somewhat abstract. Just like, I would argue, our culture's understanding of God. For many in our society food consumption is also in the realm of personal choice, perhaps forming or expressing a sense of identity

or self-improvement. Again much, this is like the popular spirituality of our times.

I think we can recover some of the wisdom of the foraging age in our relations to God. God is within all that is around us, more closely connected to the earth than we can fathom, as we and our food are.

*Rev James Brown*

*Please see Bruce Stanley's 'Forest Church', Anamchara Books, 2016 for further insights.*

## Mothers' Union

At the time of writing, we are still waiting for spring to fully unfold, but I am looking forward to the countryside colouring up and the birdsong becoming louder.

Our own members have entertained us at our evening meetings so far this year. What a talented group we have! Ann Peters spoke on 'Memories' in January, and in March, Brenda Cottle, assisted by Nicholas, our vicar, told us about their recent pilgrimage to the Holy Land. Illustrated with photographs, some of which later appeared on the church walls, the walk was interesting and often surprising. In April Carol Cooke explained how poetry had been a large influence during her life. Some of the poems rekindled in many of us happy memories of our more youthful days.

Our AGM was chaired by Judy James, a St. Albans Diocesan MU trustee. She also spoke on our theme for the year, 'In Mary Sumner's Footsteps', inspiring us for our MU work. At our AGM we thanked Janet McCaw for doing the work of our independent examiner for a number of years. She has now resigned, so we are looking for another person to do this work. Thanks

to our very efficient treasurer, I don't think it would be too onerous. If anyone thinks they could help us in this regard, please speak to me.

As usual, we made some 200 posies for Mothering Sunday, and on the day raised funds at our cake stall in the hall after the Parish Communion.

Our Deanery Lady Day service took place in St. Nicholas Church, wherein banners were processed and one of our members read a lesson. The service was conducted by Canon Dennis Stamps and an inspiring address was given by Rev. Will Gibbs, our deanery chaplain. Afterwards there was plenty of friendly chat over coffee and biscuits.

Our next fundraising effort will be serving coffee at Wesley's cafe on Saturday 5 May. Please support us if you can. There will be cakes and produce to buy.

It would be a pleasure to welcome guests as well as members to any of our meetings. Please take a programme from the notice board in the church porch or the hall; or speak to me.

*Julia Smith*

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# Getting to know the congregation

An interview with Jacky Dodd

## Have you lived around here for a while?

Yes, we moved here in 1995 and were originally living in Southdown which is how we came to come to St John's. Our two boys were christened and went to Sunday School at St John's. John and I were confirmed and had our rings blessed as part of the service here in 2001. We have since moved outside the parish but are very attached to the church, so there's no way that would change now.

## And what is your involvement with St John's?

It's got more recently. I'm on the cleaning rota; I serve a couple of times a month at the 9.30 Sunday service, and am also on the PCC. Then, linked to church, I distribute the envelopes and collect the donations during Christian Aid Week, which I've been doing for years; and also the foodbank, which is indirectly linked to church as well.

## The focus of this whole magazine is food. So what does it mean to you to be involved in the foodbank?

Well, I knew they wanted more volunteers, so I was happy to put myself forward as it is such a worthy cause. I help out at the Batford foodbank a couple of times a month. It operates on a Friday from 1-3pm. It is run on a voucher basis so people don't usually just walk in off the street. This means we can know who is coming which helps as there isn't a great amount of space to store the food there. I was inspired to get involved as it is great to feel like you're helping out and doing something worthwhile.

## Beyond church and charities, what are your other interests?

Well, I love exercise – so this morning my day started with a 6.30am spin class, and I also play tennis throughout the year, rain or shine! There are no indoor courts so we're outside all year round. I do pilates as well, and dog walking. I also love art and live music and the theatre, too. Being so close to London we are lucky to have so much on our doorstep.

## And finally, what does your faith mean to you?

I'd say that my faith is something I've always had. Of course there have been times when it has been less and times when it has been more a part of my life, but I think that it's probably something that's always there. Especially during periods of uncertainty faith is very reassuring. One of the good things is that it makes me very grateful for what I have. I enjoy helping people and being part of the community and the fellowship of St John's. I really love bringing people together, and have helped with quite a few of the social things at St John's – that's a really important aspect for me, too. It's a way of life really rather than a set of rules to follow.



# Food and Hunger

This summer we will be exploring the great 'food passage' of the Gospel of John and reflecting on how it informs our food practices today

All are welcome

**29<sup>th</sup> July, 9.30am (John 6:1-20)**

*Food enough for everyone*

A special focus on food waste

Followed by a bring and share brunch

**5<sup>th</sup> August, 9.30am (John 6:24-35)**

*I am the bread of life*

With special guest speaker talking about Foodbanks

**12<sup>th</sup> August, 9.30am (John 6:35, 41-51)**

*Living bread*

**19<sup>th</sup> August, 9.30am (John 6:51-58)**

*Whoever eats this bread will live forever*

**26<sup>th</sup> August, 9.30am (John 6:58-69)**

*Life giving words*

Followed by a bring and share brunch



st JOHN'S

# Food for thought

Very few of us have direct contact with the food we eat, unless we have a garden or allotment. The UK is blessed with a climate that is ideal for growing grass in the wetter west (so milk, cheese and meat), and cereals, especially wheat, in the drier east. Mild, wet winters and long summer days mean we have some of the best yields in the world. We have fertile soils and enterprising, well-educated farmers, good access to markets and some of the best agricultural research in the world (including Rothamsted Research in Harpenden). Yet, many of our small farmers struggle to make a living. There are now less than 10,000 dairy farmers in England and Wales. The reasons are complex, but perhaps we need to consider the true costs of sustainable food production. Farmers have a crucial role to play, not just in producing safe, healthy food, but as stewards of our beautiful countryside, keeping our precious soil fertile, enhancing biodiversity and keeping high standards of animal welfare.

We rely on many other countries for much of our food. Tea, coffee, bananas and chocolate and many other of our favourite foods, come from countries where most of the population work in agriculture. 25 million smallholders produce 80% of the world's coffee. Bananas are grown in tropical regions

millions of small-scale farmers and plantation workers; but many of them fail to earn a reliable living. One in four children in Kenya's tea and coffee-growing regions are malnourished, one in ten children in the tea-growing regions of Malawi die before their fifth birthday. Fairtrade was

set up in response to these injustices.

Fairtrade is about better prices, decent working conditions, local sustainability, and fair terms of trade for farmers and workers in the developing world. By requiring companies to pay sustainable prices (which must never fall lower than the market price), Fairtrade addresses the injustices of conventional trade, which traditionally discriminates against the poorest, weakest producers. It enables them to improve their position and have more control over their lives.

Fairtrade sets social, economic and environmental standards for both companies and the farmers and workers who grow the food. For farmers and workers the standards include protection of workers' rights and the environment, for companies they include the payment of the Fairtrade Minimum Price and an additional Fairtrade Premium to invest in business or community projects of the community's choice. Fairtrade certifies products and ingredients, which can then use the Fairtrade mark.

Fairtrade works. More than 1.6 million farmers and workers are now in Fairtrade producer groups, mostly in smallholdings. So next time you buy a coffee, or do your weekly shop, look out for this mark. Fairtrade is a simple way to make a difference to the lives of the people who grow the food we love.

Margaret Charlston,  
Traidcraft coordinator  
for St Johns  
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# The heart of faith

Pupils of St Nicholas Primary School, Harpenden, the only Church of England school in the area, were recently asked to paint pictures that show the core concepts of Christian Faith. Here are a group of pupils with their pictures.

The head teacher, Rizelle Crouch, described the pictures as 'a wonderful combination of bold images and strong colours. She said, the pictures show the pupils' enthusiasm for the challenge they were set and the strength of their understanding.'

St Nicholas Primary School has been in the news recently, appearing 9th in *The Times Top 10* out of 425 Primary schools in the whole of Hertfordshire. The league table position is based on the percentage of pupils reaching the expected standard in reading, writing and maths in the 2017 National Primary School Tests. At St Nicholas 91% of pupils met the expected standard in the new, tougher SATS against

a national average of 61% and a Harpenden average of 75%. Congratulations to all pupils and teachers for their excellent efforts to achieve these results.

More good news came in this academic year, when the school was judged *Outstanding* by the Christian schools inspection team visit (SIAMS) that was carried out in November 2017. The detailed inspection report is available on the school website [www.stnicholasce.org](http://www.stnicholasce.org).

St Nicholas Primary School is celebrating its 160th anniversary this year and has long standing links with both St Nicholas and St John's Parish churches. There are places available in September for families of all faiths and no faith.

St. Nicholas Primary School  
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# Man cannot live by bread alone

**W**e went to a dinner party last weekend. Something of a rare occurrence nowadays, which is a shame because both receiving and giving hospitality is probably one of the most enjoyable things that there is to do. We sat, ten of us, around our hosts' beautifully prepared table – laid with care and thought by their teenage children. From the very first affectionate welcome greetings given to each other to the farewell kisses and hugs, there wasn't a moment's pause in the chatter and conversation. We all shared a wonderful few hours together, shared food and wine, shared joys and laughter, experiences, even problems and worries, and we all undoubtedly came away nourished in every sense of the word. Food for the body, the spirit and the soul – we need all three to flourish and reach our full potential physically, emotionally and spiritually.

I first heard the parable of the long spoons when I was at school. I think that the version which we were told was in a book by the Scottish theologian William Barclay, but this is an allegorical tale popular not just with Christian writers but found also in Jewish, Hindu, Buddhist and other oriental writings. It aims to show the difference between Heaven and Hell, and the cartoons by Stuart McMillen visualise the distinction succinctly. In Hell, a group of people are gathered around a table with a delicious pot of nourishing food in the centre. Each person holds a long pair of spoons so that they can reach the pot. The people here are sweating and struggling as they try to feed themselves but are unable

to get the food into their mouths as the spoon handles are too long. Thinking only of their own hunger they don't consider the needs of their neighbours. They become gaunt and are starving.

In Heaven, another group of people are gathered around an identical table with the same pot of food and the same long spoons. These people are happy, relaxed and chatting with each other. They have learned to feed each other and are well nourished. It is a parable that can be used to illustrate so many things, from global to individual hunger – both physical and spiritual. When we focus only on our own hunger (needs/problems) we are unable to nourish anyone else – the converse should be our exemplar – it is, after all, a commandment that we should love our neighbours as ourselves; by so doing, we discover that there are both ways and means to feed everyone. Heaven can indeed be a place on earth. Despite an alarming trend in society today towards a loss of community and ever increasing sense of isolation (due in part to the technological advances that have been made and to changes in the structure of family life), we do still live in community with others, and for society to thrive and flourish we cannot exist as a mass of independent individuals but need to form a network, a mesh, of interaction, community and interdependence otherwise hunger and struggle for survival will persist.

The elephant in the room is trumpeting to make itself heard. Sitting down with others around a table with food, feeding others and considering their needs, living

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in community and communion with our neighbours – there is an as yet unspoken but obvious parallel to be drawn here to the Communion which we share when we come to church on Sundays. Words to do with food and meals are inextricably linked with the Communion service. The Bible is awash with references to the word of God, and Christ himself, as being the Bread of Life. Images of food and meals occur frequently throughout the Scriptures. Our shepherd is the Lord and we are the flock that he feeds. Like the dinner party that we attended, the table in church is laid for our meal with a fine linen cloth and special dishes; maybe shining silver or rustic earthenware hold the carefully prepared, and blessed, food for us to share. We stand or kneel side by side with others, having first washed our hands of those things which made us unclean by confessing our mistakes to God. We bow our heads and with our empty hands outstretched, we receive the ultimate nourishment, and by God's grace and with faith we do indeed enjoy a moment of special connection 'vertically' with our Father. Having partaken of the sacrament, we are invited to 'feed on him in our hearts by faith with thanksgiving'. We have been nourished together in a shared meal. We come together as a community and we connect 'horizontally' with those who gather with us at the altar rail and those who sit beside us in the pews. Though we are many we are one body because we all share in the one bread.

Sharing food and nourishment, physical and spiritual, provides an unmissable opportunity to experience the greatest joy and love not only with our friends but also with strangers: 'Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that

some have entertained angels without knowing it' (Hebrews 13:2). Issues of global poverty persist and many still live in darkness, as yet unaware of the light of Christ, so it must be the responsibility of those who have had the benefit of reading the instruction manual for the long spoons to pass on the benefit of their enlightenment by their example of hospitality and awareness.

'...if you offer your food to the hungry and satisfy the needs of the afflicted, then your light shall rise in the darkness and your gloom shall be like the noonday. The Lord will guide you continually and satisfy your needs in parched places, and make your bones strong; and you shall be like a watered garden, like a spring of water, whose waters never fail.'

(Isaiah 58: 10-11)

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## Project Phoenix – Our new parish centre

Throughout March and April things have been progressing behind the scenes for our new parish centre. Our architects, MEB Design, are currently preparing all the information required to submit our planning application, whilst an enthusiastic group of volunteers has been assessing our fundraising options.

In terms of fundraising, we estimate that we will need to raise in the order of £1.5m: an eye-watering amount. In light of this, we have been researching various strategies and possible avenues for our campaign. In the absence of volunteers with deep fundraising expertise, we are talking to professional fund-raising

consultants, who have been very helpful in sharing their ideas and approaches to our project. We are currently considering the appointment of a professional fundraiser to help plan and assist us with the running of our campaign. Decisions have yet to be made, and we will have more news once planning permission has been granted.

If you feel you are able to help with fundraising and would like to join a group of enthusiastic people working towards a common goal for the benefit of our local community, please do get in touch. We look forward to welcoming you aboard Project Phoenix.

The Project Phoenix Team

# Coffee Concerts

FREE classical concerts within the beautiful acoustic of St John's Church followed by coffee

**Sat 28<sup>th</sup> April, 10.30-11.15**

Roger Carter (organ) - programme to include music by Bach, Guilmandt and Mendelssohn

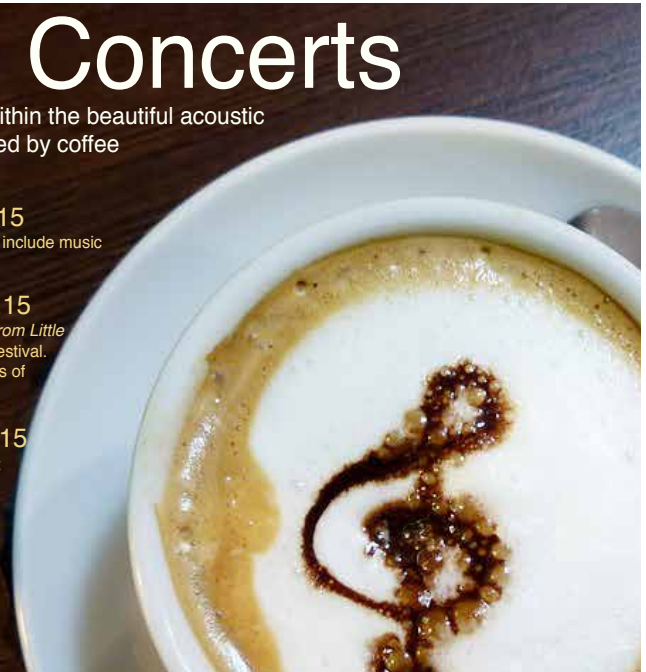
**Sat 23<sup>rd</sup> June, 10.30-11.15**

Roger Carter (organ) - *Mighty Oaks from Little Acorns Grow*. Part of Cultivate Arts Festival. Inspired by art installation with themes of nature, new beginnings and growth

**Sat 15<sup>th</sup> Sept, 10.30-11.15**

Roger Carter (organ) - part of the first ever Southdown Festival

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# Forthcoming events

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## May 2018

Wednesday 2 May	7.30 pm	Mothers' Union Branch Meeting in the committee room
Thursday 3 May		Hall is Polling Station all day for St Albans City & District Council Elections
Friday 4 May	2.00 pm	Dorcas in the committee room
Sunday 6 May	9.30 am	PCC Commissioned at 9.30 am service
Sunday 6 May	4.00 pm	Faith & Light in the parish hall
Tuesday 8 May	8.15 pm	Standing Committee in the vicarage
Friday 11 May	2.00 pm	Dorcas in the committee room
Monday 14 May	8.00 pm	Fellowship & Study Group in committee room
Friday 18 May	2.00 pm	Dorcas in the committee room
Saturday 19 May	10.30 am	Coffee Concert in church
Tuesday 22 May	8.15 pm	PCC Meeting in the committee room
Friday 25 May	3.00 pm	Tea at Three in the parish hall
Sunday 27 May	11.30 am	Family Baptism

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## June 2018

Friday 1 June	2.00 pm	Dorcas in the committee room
Sunday 3 June	4.00 pm	<i>Faith &amp; Light</i> in the parish hall
Monday 4 June	8.00 pm	Fellowship & Study Group in the committee room
Wednesday 6 June	7.30 pm	Mothers' Union Branch Meeting in the committee room
Friday 8 June	2.00 pm	Dorcas in the committee room
Sunday 10 June	11.30 am	Family Baptism
Friday 15 June	2.00 pm	Dorcas in the committee room
Thursday 21 – Sunday 24 June		Harpenden Churches Together Arts Festival <i>Beauty – Abundance – Order</i>
Friday 22 June	2.00 pm	Dorcas in the committee room

Saturday 23 June	3.00 pm	Mothers' Union <i>Wave of Prayer</i> in Lady Chapel, followed by tea in the committee room till 5 pm
Friday 29 June	3.00 pm	<i>Tea at Three</i> in the parish hall

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## July 2018

Sunday 1 July	4.00 pm	<i>Faith &amp; Light</i> in the parish hall
Friday 6 July	2.00 pm	Dorcas in the committee room
Wednesday 11 July	2.30 pm	Mothers' Union Garden Party
Friday 13 July	2.00 pm	Dorcas in the committee room
Friday 20 July	2.00 pm	Dorcas in the committee room
Friday 27 July	3.00 pm	<i>Tea at Three</i> in the parish hall

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## August 2018

Thursday 2 August	12 noon	Mothers' Union Deanery lunch in the parish hall
Friday 3 August	2.00 pm	Dorcas in the committee room
Friday 10 August	2.00 pm	Dorcas in the committee room
Friday 17 August	2.00 pm	Dorcas in the committee room
Friday 24 August	2.00 pm	Dorcas in the committee room
Friday 31 August	3.00 pm	<i>Tea at Three</i> in the parish hall

#### PARISH OFFICE

For enquiries, including marriages, baptisms, funerals and hall bookings, please contact the parish office open from 9.00 am to 1.00 pm Monday to Friday.

Telephone: 01582 712776  
parish.office@  
stjohnsharpenden.org.uk

#### Parish Directory

#### VICAR

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vicar@stjohnsharpenden.org.uk  
5 St John's Road  
Telephone: 07983 561387

**Revd James Brown**  
Telephone: 07813 464 643  
james@stjohnsharpenden.org.uk

#### PERMISSION TO OFFICIATE

**Revd Julia White**

#### READERS

**Lauryn Awbrey**  
**David Nye (PTO)**

#### LOCAL LAY LEADER OF WORSHIP

**Emma Bresslaw**  
**Elizabeth Brown**

#### WARDENS

**James Hillman**  
Telephone: 07788 567826  
wardens@stjohnsharpenden.org.uk

**Mary Jean Pritchard**  
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#### DIRECTOR OF MUSIC

**Roger Carter**  
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#### TREASURER

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treasurer@stjohnsharpenden.org.uk

#### STEWARDSHIP

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