

FEBRUARY 2009 – FORTHCOMING EVENTS

Mon	Tues	Wed	Thurs	Fri	Sat	Sun
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Key to abbreviations AAW = All Age Worship HC = Holy Communion LEF = Ladies Evening Fellowship SoW = Service of the Word W&S = Word and Spirit						
						7.45am HC 10.30am SoW 6.30pm W&S
2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Power House Day 4.45pm KIC Cell	9am Re:Fresh 11am Parent Play 12pm Restore 3.30pm Blend 5pm Break:thru 7pm Sublime 7.30pm Alpha 7.45pm LEF 8pm Baptism Course	10am Bumps & Babes	9.30am Toddlers 11.15am Toddlers 3.30pm Blend 5pm Youth Band	9am Re:Fresh 1pm STEPS Coffee Afternoon	Alpha Away day 2pm Worship Day	7.45am HC 10.30am HC 6.30pm HC
9	10	11	12	13	14	15
4.45pm KIC Cell 8pm PCC	Re:Fresh, Parent Play, Restore, Break:thru, Blend, Sublime and Alpha (as on 3rd)	10am Bumps & Babes	9.30am Toddlers 11.15am Toddlers 3.30pm Blend	9am Re:Fresh	7pm Mix	7.45am HC 10.30am AAW 6.30pm W&S
16	17	18	19	20	21	22
8pm Leadership Support Team	10am Re:Fresh 12pm Restore				10am Dads & Toddlers 7.30pm Tonbridge Philharmonic Concert	7.45am HC 10.30am SoW 6.30pm W&S
23	24	25	26	27	28	
4.45pm KIC Cell 8pm Standing & Finance	Re:Fresh, Parent Play, Restore, Blend, and Alpha (as on 3rd) 6.30pm Souled Out	10am Bumps & Babes	9.30am Toddlers 10.45am Toddler Praise 11.15am Toddlers 3.30pm Blend	9am Re:Fresh 8pm Men's Wine Tasting	11am Dave & Closer 7pm Mix	

Plus some key dates for your diary:

2 March Powerhouse
13 March Quiz Night
21 March Spirituality Feast
22 March Mothering Sunday

Homegroups meet on the following days:

Tuesday 8pm
 Wednesday 10am and 8pm
 Thursday 8pm
 Friday 9.30am (Woman to Woman)
 If you would be interested in joining one of our many homegroups, please contact the Church Office

If you wish to contribute an article to Encompass, please contact co-editors Chris Mottershead: csmott@talktalk.net (tel 01732 351815) or Teresa Dumasy: t-dumasy@waitrose.com (tel 01732 352584)

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FEBRUARY 2009

IS THERE STILL SCOPE FOR A CREATOR?

Charles Darwin was born on 12 February 1809, and so throughout this year there are celebrations planned to commemorate his 200th anniversary

Darwin is best known for his book *On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection*. This publication was extremely controversial, because in it he put forward his theory of evolution, which suggested that by the process of natural selection, animals best suited to their environment are more likely to survive and reproduce, passing on the characteristics which helped them survive to their offspring. Gradually, the species changes over time.

The logical extension of Darwin's theory was that Homo sapiens was simply another form of animal. It made it seem possible that even people might just have evolved – quite possibly from apes – and challenged the prevailing orthodoxy that the world was created by God in seven days as described in the Bible. Darwin was vehemently attacked, particularly by the Church.

Over the years his ideas became the new orthodoxy, but more recently creationism has been increasing in popularity, so that in America it is reported that more people believe in the biblical story than they do in evolution, and a recent poll for *The Guardian* indicated that 25 per cent of UK teachers support the teaching of creationism in secondary school science courses.

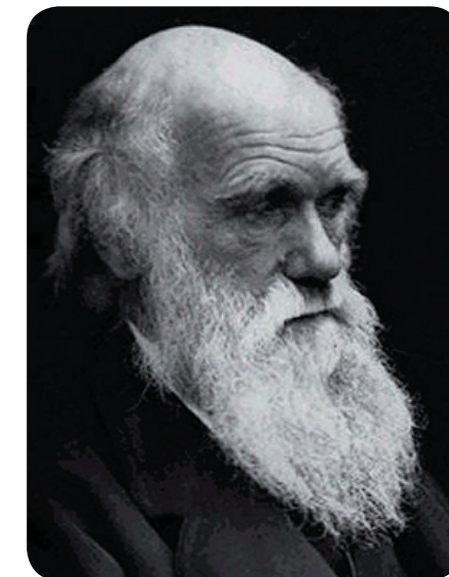
The well-known atheist Richard Dawkins' response was that it would be a 'national disgrace' if such a high percentage of teachers believe this, adding that the teachers must be either 'stupid' or 'ignorant'. But Thomas Crowley, a professor of geosciences at the University of Edinburgh, has suggested that the poll was ambiguous because 'there are at least two interpretations of "creationism".'

He writes, 'A "hard" definition is that the earth is about 6000 years old and that God created man and all the other creatures as in the Book of Genesis. This definition is out of line with virtually all scientific evidence.'

But if we take the Genesis account as a story of how God created rather than as scientific or historical evidence, we can have a 'softer' definition of creationism. Perhaps God created and has allowed, even participated in, animals, plants, even humanity, evolving over thousands of years? Science can state a great deal about what followed after the big bang, but science cannot explain how something arose from nothing. As Crowley states, 'This yawning logical gap leaves open the possibility that something else may be going on.'

Evolution v Creator - we will hear much on this debate over the coming months.

Rev Mark Barker
Vicar



Jim Thorneycroft

Rev Jim Thorneycroft was inducted as Minister for Christ Church URC Tonbridge and Tudeley cum Capel with Five Oak Green at a service on Saturday 31 January.

Jim, his wife Sue and daughter are moving from a church in Weymouth, Dorset, although Jim has strong

links with Kent as he lived in Staplehurst before answering a call to full-time ministry. He also spent a year working at Maidstone United Reformed Church. Jim is chairman of Farm Crisis Network, a national charity for those working in agriculture. While at Weymouth, he helped to set up a branch of the national Street Pastors initiative in the town.

THE HOLOCAUST

A colleague of mine once wrote, 'the Holocaust was a catastrophe for western civilisation: an unprecedented event in the long history of human atrocity, it strikes at the core of our values, traditions, culture, beliefs and our understanding of human behaviour'. 27 January was Holocaust memorial day, the date echoing the liberation or discovery of Auschwitz in 1945 by the Soviet army. An internationally recognised memorial day, it is clear that remembrance of these events and indeed of other atrocities sit squarely in the psyche of the international community. Our cinema and television screens also reflect the ongoing interest and desire to grapple with the events of the Second World War; films such as 'The boy in the striped pyjamas', 'Valkyrie', 'The Reader', 'Defiance' and the New Year television production 'The Diary of Anne Frank', are all, with varying degrees of success, recent representations of this complex past.

Working in the field of Holocaust education, 'water-cooler' moments can be challenging. A question often asked is 'where was God in Auschwitz?' or 'is it still possible to have a faith after the Holocaust?'. The position of the church in this period of history has been much discussed and debated by historians, as has the role of antisemitism with its roots in the Roman crucifixion of Jesus, who lived and died as a Jewish man. My own faith has been challenged and deepened by this history. Developing knowledge of the fullness and diversity of Jewish people, their faith and culture, has furthered my understanding of the origins of Christianity, enriched my experience, and continues to provide essential context in the life-long journey we call faith.

Emma O'Brien

*Paul Salmons, Head of Curriculum Development, Holocaust Education Development Programme, Institute of Education, London

WHO'S WHO

The Ramsdens

Joanne met Zak ten years ago at St Stephen's Church. Joanne recalls: 'Strictly speaking, we met at the curate's house for Sunday lunch. Yes, we were set up, but immediately found we had plenty in common, not least the fact that we had attended the same school, 300 miles away, near Newcastle.'

Joanne came to faith in 1992 and Zak in 1998 after an Alpha course at Somerhill.

They were married at St Stephen's in 2000 and have two boys: Noah, seven and Ethan, four, who attend Sussex Road Primary School. Joanne works as an RE teacher. Zak is an accountant at a firm in Tonbridge so he does the school run on his bike.

They are members of the Spickernells' home group. Zak has been Treasurer since 1999 and Joanne helps out with KIC and does prayers.

They love going to the cinema and in the year before



A pair of shoes left behind after a deportation action in the Kovno ghetto. Circa 1943 Lithuania. Photo courtesy of George Kadish/Zvi Kadushin, #81082, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, www.ushmm.org

Emma is Holocaust Education Officer at the Imperial War Museum London. She is married to Andrew (the one with the beard who plays the bass guitar at the front and is known for telling inappropriate jokes). They moved to Tonbridge from London ten years ago, and while Emma commutes to London, Andrew works for Yeomans, a Christian-run design and print management company, who have recently relocated from Tudeley to new offices in Paddock Wood. In a rare moment of weakness some time ago, Jason asked them both if they would attend a course for those interested in finding out more about leading a homegroup – something which they have been doing for the past two and a half years.



Noah arrived went 52 times. Their attendance has dropped off somewhat. These days they also enjoy cycling together, although a mother/son outing last June left Noah with a broken arm. Zak plays badminton and Joanne enjoys swimming.

THOUGHT FOR THE MONTH

Why are psychics acceptable and Jesus isn't?

I read the other day that Radio 2 presenter Jeremy Vine is reluctant to admit on air that he's a Christian. The reason, he says, is that society has become increasingly intolerant of people expressing religious views. In modern Britain, he adds, 'it's almost socially unacceptable to say you believe in God.' So he doesn't talk about his faith on his show because he's fearful how people will react.

And yet, the same newspaper carried an article describing how worried, wealthy professionals from the business and financial worlds are increasingly seeking advice from psychics to help them make decisions about their careers.

It seems you can admit to almost any belief, however bizarre, and most people don't mind or don't care. Toleration is all. But say you're a Christian in middle-class, liberal circles and people think you're eccentric or embarrassing.

Picture a dinner party where the conversation turns to the credit crunch and how to cope with it. Guest A mentions that he's been to consult a clairvoyant about his job prospects. 'How fascinating,' his fellow guests will probably say. 'Do tell us more.' Guest B then announces

that he's trusting Jesus and believes that God has a plan for his life. You can imagine the awkward silence, the clearing of throats, the glances at the hostess as if to say, 'Who invited this wierdo?'

Why should this be? Despite the aggressive atheism of Richard Dawkins and others, many people in Britain would still admit to having a sense of the spiritual. (How many celebrity interviews include the phrase, 'I'm really quite a spiritual person?') So why, in the quest for spiritual fulfilment, are psychics acceptable and Jesus isn't?

Possibly it's about control. As long as 'the spiritual' remains vague and doesn't make demands on our behaviour, it's socially OK to hold some kind of belief. Unfortunately, Jesus isn't like that. Jesus insists that he's in control. He's alarmingly specific about what it takes to follow him. He makes claims on our lives: psychics don't.

Maybe behind the embarrassment that people feel about Jesus is this sense of danger – of having to surrender control if we take him seriously. That's never been a popular message. It wasn't in the Garden of Eden. It isn't in 21st century Britain.

Graham Jones

GLOWING OFSTED REPORT FOR STEPS PRE-SCHOOL

Steps is St Stephen's community childcare provision, offering pre-school childcare and education, and an after-school club every day for children from our local primary schools.

Although both the pre-school and the after-school club are inclusive and open to all, the whole of Steps is firmly founded on a Christian ethos.

Steps is a wonderful expression of our practical involvement in the community. We are able to bring the love of Jesus to the children in Steps as we care for them, and to be a real help and witness to the families with whom we have contact.

At the end of 2008, The Steps Pre-School was inspected by Ofsted. Dave Fenn, a member of St Stephen's and the manager of Steps, takes up the story:

'Ofsted are a government body responsible for the inspection of registered early years settings such as ours. They carry out an unannounced inspection every 2-3 years to check on the quality and standards of our provision.

'The report was very glowing in its praise of what we have achieved at Steps. The inspector made specific mention of the way children are nurtured and supported. She also recognised that we have a strong commitment towards seeking out and making continual improvements.'

This Ofsted report is a real achievement for the staff

of Steps and all who are involved in this precious ministry. It rated all aspects of the provision as 'strong', a further improvement on the already good report from the last inspection.

Dave comments, 'We have a fantastic and dedicated team of people who not only show a real love for children, but who also are prepared to go that extra mile in order that we can offer the very best in care and education.'

If you want to support Steps, you can do that by your prayers, or by practical help. 'We have various fundraising opportunities,' says Dave, 'the main one being our annual summer fete (held this year on Saturday 6 June). We are reliant upon a small band of volunteers made up of staff, parents and church members but we are always looking for more people to help out on the day.'

If you're interested in finding out more about what Steps provides for our community you can ring the Steps office on 01732 363642

The Ofsted report can be found online at [http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/oxcare_providers/full/\(urn\)/956291](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/oxcare_providers/full/(urn)/956291)

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