

MARCH 2010 – FORTHCOMING EVENTS						
Mon	Tues	Wed	Thurs	Fri	Sat	Sun
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Powerhouse Vision Evening (8pm) 4.45pm KIC Cell	9am Re:Fresh 12pm Restore 3.30pm Blend 6.45pm (for 7pm) Elements Celebration - Alpha 6 7.30pm LEF	10am Bumps & Babes 11am HC 8pm Marriage Course	9.30am & 11.15am Toddlers 3.30pm Blend	9am Re:Fresh	9am CPT 10am HotS 7pm Mix	7.45am HC 10.30am HC 7pm TES
8	9	10	11	12	13	14
9am Powerhouse prayers 4.45pm KIC Cell 8pm PCC	9am Re:Fresh 12pm Restore 3.30pm Blend 5pm Elements (y7-9) Cells 7pm Elements (y10-13) Alpha 7 8pm STEPS Fundraising	10am Bumps & Babes 11am HC 8pm Marriage Course	9.30am & 11.15am Toddlers 3.30pm Blend 8pm SPM	9am Re:Fresh	10am HotS 9am Walking Group	7.45am HC 10.30am SoW 7pm TES
15	16	17	18	19	20	21
9am Powerhouse prayers 4.45pm KIC Cell 8pm PMT 8pm LST	9am Re:Fresh 12pm Restore 3.30pm Blend 5pm Elements (y7-9) Break:Out 7pm Elements (y10-13) Alpha 8	10am Bumps & Babes 11am HC 8pm Marriage Course 8pm STEPS meeting	9.30am & 11.15am Toddlers 3.30pm Blend 6pm YB	9am Re:Fresh	PCC & LST Awayday 10am HotS 7pm Mix	7.45am HC 10.30am Baptism 7pm TES
22	23	24	25	26	27	28
9am Powerhouse prayers 4.45pm KIC Cell 8pm S&F	9am Re:Fresh 12pm Restore 3.30pm Blend 5pm Elements (y7-9) Cells 7pm Elements (y10-13) Alpha 9 8pm Prayer Ministry Team	10am Bumps & Babes 11am HC 8pm Homegroup Pastor Meeting	9.30am & 11.15am Toddlers 3.30pm Blend	9am Re:Fresh 8pm Men's Evening	9am CPT 10am HotS	7.45am HC 10.30am SoW 7pm TES (inc. HC)
29	30	31	Key to abbreviations : CPT = Child Protection Training HotS = Healing on the Streets LST = Leadership Support Team SPM = STEPS Prayer Meeting YB = Youth Band HC = Holy Communion LEF = Ladies' Evening Fellowship SoW = Service of the Word TES = The Evening Service			

Plus some key dates for your diary:

12th April Powerhouse Day
 16th April All Souls Orchestra
 25th April Annual Parochial Church Meeting
 Join us every day in church for prayer - 9am on Mondays (an hour), and 8.50am Tuesdays-Fridays (10 mins)

St Stephen's Church Office: 34d Quarry Hill Road, Tonbridge
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MARCH 2010

ELECTIONS

Who will get your vote this May?

It will not be long before the date of the next General Election is announced, and already the news is full of political comment and vying for position. Whilst some may have become a bit cynical of politicians and the political process, I believe that it would be wrong not to vote, for we need government and are encouraged in the Bible to interact with and pray for our political leaders. Once candidates have been announced, the church leaders hope to organise hustings where we can question the local candidates, and consider carefully who we will vote for.

I do not know whether any extremist political parties will be standing in this area, however the number of elected representatives from these parties at borough, district, county and even European levels has increased over the past decade. What is our response to such groups?

There has been much in the media about groups promoting policies that are harmful to community relations and divide society on the basis of ethnicity and faith, promoting divisive, intolerant and racist politics. The recent discourse of the far-right has developed in a direction where this intolerance is often cloaked in the language of culture and faith. Lately the British National Party (BNP) has sought to promote itself as a guardian of 'British Christian heritage', and claim to have established a 'Christian Council of Britain' which erroneously stresses the 'godly importance of race and nation'.

In 2004 the General Synod of the Church of England stated that 'this Synod...believe that any political party that seeks to divide our communities on the basis of ethnicity is an affront to the nature of God revealed in creation and scripture...consequently voting for and/or supporting a political party that offers racist policies is incompatible with Christian discipleship', and it called 'on all Christians in England to nurture a loathing of the sin of racism and to model the teaching of Christ in loving all our neighbours'.

In May 2009 the Archbishops of York and Canterbury, concerned with the impact of the political crisis on

people's voting in the European and Local Elections, issued a statement that said, 'There are those who would exploit the present situation to advance views that are the very opposite of the values of justice, compassion and human dignity that are rooted in our Christian heritage. Christians have been deeply disturbed by the conscious adoption by the BNP of the language of our faith when the effect of those policies is not to promote those values but to foster fear and division within communities, especially between people of different faiths or racial background. This is not a moment for voting in favour of any political party whose core ideology is about sowing division in our communities and hostility on grounds of race, creed or colour; it is an opportunity for renewing the vision of a community united by mutual respect, high ethical standards and the pursuit of justice and peace.'



In the light of this, the Bishop of Tonbridge has advised clergy and people in this Diocese to become involved in the political process and to ensure that we allow our Christian convictions to shape our vote, but not to give a platform to such groups as the BNP in the run-up to the forthcoming elections. As he said, 'We need to encourage all things that make for human flourishing, to stand for the values of love, justice and forgiveness so that we can grow into the fullness of the children of God, and it is important to root out and challenge those things that do not enable this growing and flourishing.'

As we start to think about the next General Election, as we hear the policies and promises of the different parties and candidates, let us consider prayerfully who will get our vote.

Rev Mark Barker

A FEAST OF LIVING SPIRITUALITY

Saturday 6 March 12.30-6pm
Rochester Cathedral

Following the success of a similar event two years ago, and the Spirituality Feast last March at St Stephen's, the Rochester Spirituality Network is holding another 'Feast'. Everyone is welcome. Participants are invited to attend two of the ten workshops which include:

- Using your body in prayer
- Dreams and wholeness
- Making a start with living spirituality
- Pray as you walk
- Faith and work
- Praying with the Bible in daily life
- Using prayer to reflect on the day
- Living and praying together in Community (led by the Community of St Stephen's)
- Spirituality and Creation

Timetable:

12.30 - Register & bring your own lunch (drinks provided)

1.30 - Welcome

2.00 - Workshop 1

3.15 - Evensong or personal space.

4.00 - Workshop 2

5.15 - Worship. (Feast ends at 6pm.)

There will be prayer corners and information about the Spirituality Network, retreats, spiritual accompaniment and Quiet Days. Suggested donation £5. To book, contact the Training Department (01634 560000 or training@rochester.anglican.org). For further details or to arrange a lift, call Sheila Bell on 01732 352693.

Please consider attending. Those who have been before have found it inspiring and helpful in moving forward in their walk with God as they experience different approaches to prayer.

MISSION ACTION GROUP

When Cockermouth in Cumbria was flooded again, it was suggested that as a church we could send some money from the disaster and relief fund. This was discussed at the MAG meeting and an amount of £2000 was suggested. Having spoken to the curate at Cockermouth, she explained that the church was doing its best to respond in both small ways with hot drinks and food and in providing larger grants where there was a clear need. And so at the end of November a cheque was sent to Christ Church. And now we have received a thank you.

I have been asked to write to you to let you know how your generous gift has been used. A group of householders who have been flooded 3-4 times over the years received a gift as a reminder that people from all over the country have been moved by their plight and given money. Paying their children's nursery fees helped one family, as the mother had lost her job and didn't want her children to lose their nursery places. Another lady's cleaning business had to move outside of Cockermouth into temporary accommodation and whose car broke down and it needed several hundreds of pounds spent on it to make it roadworthy again. A Turkish man who had to send his family back to Turkey as he lives above his business and cannot afford temporary accommodation. He is living in awful conditions with no running water so was helped financially. Others, who had insurance, have found that their insurance cover has not been adequate and so the Fund has helped them.

So, to date we have spent well over half the money donated to the Christ Church Relief Fund and we are now waiting till other householders move back into their properties in the coming months to find out how we can assist them financially.

As you can imagine there are many other tales to tell as Cockermouth is very very slowly trying to return to normal. However for the Main Street it will be many months before all the businesses are back in their premises.

Many blessings

Gillian Hackney, Flood Fund Secretary

BOOKSHELF

Prayer: Does It Make Any Difference?
by Philip Yancey

What the book says

'What is prayer? What difference does it make? Why and how should we pray? What about unanswered prayer? How should we understand prayer for physical healing? [Philip Yancey's] quest to unravel these mysteries reads as the journal of a fellow traveller: observing, questioning, lamenting the unexplainable and rejoicing in the discovery of awesome insights.'

What we say

Philip Yancey always writes well, and *Prayer: Does It Make Any Difference?* is no exception. The style is easy and accessible, and yet does not duck the difficult aspects of prayer. The book explores many of the questions that Christians most often have about prayer and how our prayer lives can be enriched and deepened. It challenges

our preconceptions about prayer and about what happens when we pray.

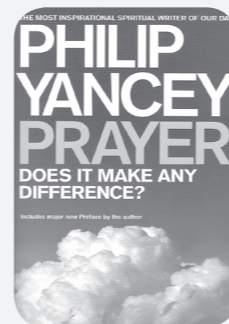
Who should read this?

The bedrock of our faith is our relationship with God, and that relationship is based on prayer. Anyone who wishes to deepen their relationship with God through prayer, or who has unanswered questions about prayer, will find this book helpful and encouraging.

Quote

'I have since learned that Christians who have no access to earthly power truly believe prayer gives them access to a greater power. They see prayer, in fact, as our strongest weapon against invisible forces.'

Prayer: Does It Make Any Difference?, Philip Yancey, Published by Hodder & Stoughton (New Edition 2008) ISBN: 978-0-340-90909-6 UK RRP: £7.99



WHO'S WHO

Rachael Smith

I'm Rachael Smith and I've been a member of St Stephen's since moving to Tonbridge. I'm originally from Ormskirk, Lancashire. I became a Christian as a teenager (that's what happens when your friend's a vicar's daughter!). I left home to study and then worked in the North East, before spending two years working abroad with World Vision. On returning to the UK, I secured a job in Tonbridge with the plan to move on after a couple of years. Although, it hasn't quite happened as 15 years later and I'm still here! I've worked in a variety of schools throughout the South East and currently I'm Head of a special school in West Sussex.

I live in Hadlow Road, after having lived in four different houses in the south end of town (I liked moving house!). It's just me and the cat, a ginger tom called Marmalade. (Feel free to add your own, stereotypical jokes about being single and owning a cat – in my case, they're probably true!)

During the past 15 years, I've seen many changes at St Stephen's. I was privileged to be one of the founding leaders of Bedrock (the predecessor to Sublime) and spent five fantastic years amongst the young people in the church. The arrival of Jim and Vicky enabled me to take a well-earned break. It thrills me to see how the Children and Youth Work has grown to become such a vibrant ministry. More recently, I was asked to assist with Youth Alpha, which led to helping out at Sublime. Having the opportunity to spend time with our young people and be amongst their energy, creativity and enthusiasm has been a real honour.

In addition to the youth work, I've been a member of the PCC, the prayer ministry team, a welcomer and a baker for Re:Fresh. Unfortunately, my current job means that I had to cut down my church roles, although you may still see me occasionally 'welcoming' on a Sunday morning or reading during the service, but that's about it for now. Even my home group are struggling to remember what I look like!

Looking back, the changes in the church (in its leadership, membership and buildings) are testament that we live in a world that doesn't stand still. Changes in my own circumstances have occurred at almost the same alarming rate, which can be unnerving and utterly terrifying.

However, by *belonging* to my church, I've been safe in the knowledge that the constancy of God and the fellowship of others will always provide me with that place of retreat, for when I need respite from the chaos of life. Thankfully St Stephen's has always been that safe haven and for that I am truly blessed – maybe that's why I've stayed in Tonbridge for so long.



THOUGHT FOR THE MONTH

Five stages of persecution

You may remember Stuart Windsor who preached at St Stephen's last year. Stuart runs Christian Solidarity Worldwide which speaks up for persecuted Christians. Having studied the patterns of persecution around the world, he sees five stages in the process. It starts with disinformation about Christianity then moves on to discrimination, active persecution, imprisonments and martyrdoms.

For present day martyrs we need to look to countries like Iran and Nigeria. Fortunately we're a long way from that point in Britain. Nevertheless, Stuart would say we're at the discrimination stage.

Is he right? Recent cases of Christians dismissed from their jobs because they've worn a cross or offered to pray for people would suggest he is. But if so, has there been a disinformation phase that has brought us to where we are now?

Possibly yes. Some of it is simple ignorance. We've been through a generation that typically went to Sunday school and could still recite the Lord's Prayer, even if it no longer believed. We now have a generation

that knows as much about Christianity as it does about particle physics. And this is fertile ground for the more serious disinformation – the secularist line that religious belief is no longer just a harmless eccentricity but a threat to reason, tolerance, human rights and equal opportunity.

Harriet Harman's recent Equality Bill shows how ignorance and disinformation eventually start to harden into law. The underlying assumption that religion 'discriminates' and must therefore be corrected by legislation does not bode well for our future freedom.

I don't know if the pendulum has to swing all the way to martyrdom before it returns. I hope not. In the coming years I hope we, the church, can push back the present ignorance and disinformation before we move another notch along Stuart Windsor's spectrum.

Graham Jones

