

June 2013 – forthcoming events						
Mon	Tues	Wed	Thurs	Fri	Sat	Sun
Key to abbreviations : HC = Holy Communion MITM = Men in the morning DT=Dads & Toddlers SOW = Service of the word TES = The Evening Service AAS = All Age Service HotS = Healing on the Street YE = Younger Elements OE = Older Elements LTF= Ladies Thursday Fellowship BB = Bumps & Babes SRC = Standing & Resource					1	2
					10am HotS	7.45am HC 10.30am AAS 2.30 Football 6.30pm TES
3	4	5	6	7	8	9
12.30pm Contemplative prayer 4.45pm KIC Cell 7.30pm Central Gathering	9am Re:Fresh 3pm Blend 5pm YE 7pm OE 7.30pm Confirmation prep	10am B&B 11am HC	9.45am Toddlers 10am LTF 10am MITM 3 pm Blend	9am Re:Fresh 7.30pm Quiz	10am HotS 11 am Steps Fete	7.45am HC 10.30am Baptism 6.30pm TES
10	11	12	13	14	15	16
4.45pm KIC Cell 8pm SRC	9am Re:Fresh 3pm Blend 5pm YE 7.30pm Confirmation Service at St P&P	10am B&B 11am HC	9.45am Toddlers 10am MITM 3pm Blend	9am Re:Fresh	10am D&T 10am HotS 7pm Mix	7.45am HC 10.30am SOW 6.30pm TES
17	18	19	20	21	22	23
4.45pm KIC Cell	9am Re:Fresh 3pm Blend 5pm YE 7pm OE	10am B&B 11am HC	9.45am Toddlers 10am MITM 3pm Blend	9am Re:Fresh 8pm Friday @ 8	10am HotS	7.45am HC 10.00am Open air service Tonbridge Park 6.30pm United Service St P&P
24	25	26	27	28	29	30
4.45pm KIC Cell	9am Re:Fresh 3pm Blend 5pm YE 7pm OE	10am B&B 11am HC	9.45am Toddlers 10am MITM 3pm Blend	9am Re:Fresh 7.30pm Ladies Evening	10am HotS 7pm Mix	7.45am HC 10.30am HC 6.30pm TES

This is Rebecca, (the daughter of Daniel Ciupe who runs the Charis Foundation in Romania - our mission partners), and Ciprian who got married at the end of April



ENC COMPASS

THE MONTHLY ST STEPHEN'S CHURCH NEWSLETTER

Opportunities and excitement

June 2013

Can we turn our reaction to a tough question from avoidance to opportunity and from fear to excitement? Is this possible? Life will be more fun for us if we can make that change; the current sermon series may help!

Last Sunday evening Mark's sermon used a quote from a comedian and atheist, Penn, 'How much do you have to hate someone to believe that eternal life is possible and not to tell them.' As Jesus tells us to love so we must try to answer our friends' questions. When we fail in this we become one more excuse for that person not to believe. The apostle Paul says, Col 4:5-6, 'Live wisely among those who are not believers, and make the most of every opportunity. Let your conversation be gracious and attractive so that you will have the right response for everyone.' In 1 Peter 3:15-16, Peter says the same, 'If someone asks about your Christian hope, always be ready to explain it. But do this in a gentle and respectful way.'

Jesus tells us not to fear or worry many times; in particular he said, 'do not worry about how you will defend yourselves or what you should say, for the Holy Spirit will teach you at that time what you should say' (Luke 12:11b-12). I remember a wise church leader explaining to one of my sons that they had to make an effort to fill their heads with the truth first before the Holy Spirit could bring the right bits out at the right time. Daily Bible reading should be enough to maintain that but it may also be a good idea to read one of the many books on answering questions.

Having decided not to be afraid doesn't mean we have to answer every question fully. It is fine to say you don't know and offer to look it up or ask someone and remember to go back with an answer. The Bible is reassuring on this point; in 1 Cor 13:12 Paul says that he only knows in part but when in heaven he will know fully. But it is right to give people an answer, they want to know that we have

thought about these things and by giving our best answer we might see them come to a faith that leads to eternal life.

It's never too early to start praying for your friends as all attempts to bring them to Christ are a spiritual battle and for that we need the spiritual weapon of prayer, we can't fight battles like that on our own and expect to win. It's never too early to pray – and until they take their last breath it's not too late either. It's not too late to start when you are asked a spiritual question – it only takes a few seconds to pray for help; quicker to ask God for help than think of a reply on your own.

Keep your answers short and leave room for further questions; leave space as you would in any conversation for your friend to respond, or ask them, 'Did that help?' If they know you are listening and care enough to answer they'll come to you next time too.

If you want to have a look at a good Bible Q and A session try John 4; Jesus talks to the Samaritan woman. Look at Acts 17 too. Paul is talking in Athens but when some people start to sneer he stops. Later, those who want to know more go to find him.

I now enjoy answering any questions about my faith. When I had a fairly routine job I cheered up my day by praying before I went that God would give me an opportunity to share my faith, the eyes to see the opportunity, the courage to use it and the words as necessary. That led to many crazy conversations and a few conversions that I know of. Giving people the opportunity to find Christ has to be endlessly rewarding – I imagine we'll be aware of it all through eternity! It's fun, it's challenging, once you start may you never stop and may you see lives changed because you had the courage to answer a question or two.

Sheila Perkins

Baptism testimonials

I was brought up in a loving and caring Christian family, but after struggling with deafness, lack of self-confidence and several other problems my faith and understanding became very shallow, until I had no interest in what the Christian life could offer. This continued until life became so unbearable that suicide became a real temptation and a possibility. Thankfully, the love of Christ and my family prevented me from such a thing and in January 2012 I came to St Stephens. I now can't imagine a life without God. Many amazing things have occurred since January; where God is taking me or with whom I don't know but I'm sure it will be amazing!

Michael Tingey

More testimonials inside...

Baptism testimonials continued

I cannot pinpoint when or how I became a Christian. I began praying when I was about 16 or 17 during a period of particular difficulty and I found comfort in talking to God. I was reluctant to attend church a couple of years later as I saw my relationship with God as purely personal but I began to feel Him in church and to trust Him. I then had a time where I drifted away from church; the light never went out but it faded. The biggest answer to prayer came when I was in a job I hated. I dreaded the days and came home crying. I wanted to leave but couldn't just walk away. For 18 months I prayed for a job where I would be happy and could make a difference. With the verse 'stand firm and you will see the deliverance of God today' always carried around with me, I had the conviction that He would move me. I wavered a couple of times but I knew He had a plan. A lower paid role with fewer hours was offered to me. I wondered if I was doing the right thing but the day after I handed in my notice the old firm announced redundancies. My leaving had prevented someone else from losing their job. I knew then that I'd endured as much as He knew I could. God had made this happen.

Amanda

On growing old

The days can seem long yet the years pass by so quickly..... Was it really over 50 years ago that I was married and began my life in Tonbridge? So full of joy and hope, looking forward to all that lay ahead, confident that God had brought me to this place in my life. And they were good years. God blessed me with a wonderful husband and two healthy children, as well as a supportive church family where I grew in my faith under a succession of committed Christian leaders, and had opportunities to serve others.

All too soon the children grew up and the two of us were left to make a different kind of life together. We enjoyed making music, going to the opera, holidays etc., and each played our different roles in the life of the church, as we looked forward to growing old together.

But God's thoughts are not our thoughts, neither are His ways our ways, and at 68 I found myself on my own – a widow. What now? I felt very strongly that God was with me in all my heartache and that He had more for me to do, and so I soldiered on and found I was able to do things that had not been possible for me previously. I had not realised how many people were in a similar situation – having lost their life partner – so I joined a group for 'singles' and helped to form a group for Christian widows and widowers, which continues to meet on a regular basis. Life became fulfilling again, though different, and could still be enjoyable. There are many opportunities for people on their own to help and befriend those who have suffered bereavement: because of their personal experience they can honestly say 'I know how you feel'. Too often when people say this, although with the best of intentions, they don't know.

So now, at the age of 77, with some of the aches and pains associated with 'growing old', what have I to look forward to? Well, if I were not a Christian time would be running out, and the best of my life would be behind me. But that's not the case because I know that THE BEST IS YET TO COME! Some of my family and friends have already finished their journey on earth and are now rejoicing in the presence of God – and I expect to join them one day. Death is not the end for the Christian – it's 'the end of the beginning' and the beginning of something far more wonderful, beautiful, and eternal.

But I am rushing ahead! Life is to be lived one day at a time; God gives us our 'daily bread', strength for today, not for tomorrow as well. I know I can trust God to be with me always. As Psalm 92 says: 'They (the godly) flourish in the courts of our God. Even in old age they will still produce fruit; they will remain vital and green.' I'm not finished yet! One of my favourite songs is 'Your love never fails, it never gives up, it never runs out on me.'

I read something really encouraging recently in UCB's The Word for Today: '*The next time you see a butterfly soaring, stop and remind yourself, 'That's my future!' No matter how you dress your body up, at best it will always be a caterpillar. But when it emerges from the cocoon of death and rises to meet the Lord in the air, it will take on His beauty and His likeness.'*

Herbert Lockyer wrote: '*.....sleep, when applied to death, refers only to the body, not the soul. The dust sleeps in the earth awaiting resurrection, but the soul of the Christian is as conscious the hour after death as the hour before it.'*

Do you have that certainty?

Eileen Best.

Zambian teaching trip proves challenging

At the beginning of May I travelled to Zambia to explore potential future working partnerships with an American organisation. This was to be a complex and at times challenging trip. I participated in a week-long hospital-based teaching event which was followed by three further teaching events to the fire brigade, university medical school and a mission hospital in the south of the country. Additionally, I quite unexpectedly found myself providing clinical care at an orphanage and HIV/TB hospital run by a Catholic order of nuns founded by Mother Teresa.

The trip was organised by an American doctor who currently lives in Zambia and we were joined by two paramedic/fire fighters and a nurse all from the US. It quickly became apparent that despite the preplanning there were a number of issues that undermined the effective teamwork. Perhaps most importantly, the organisation that we believed we were joining no longer existed. The American doctor had been the director and had been party to it being closed some two years ago. Despite this, trips were organised under its auspices despite no church or other backing! Another very serious issue was the attitude and demeanour of the doctor which frequently led to team discomfort and distress, not least because of the offence caused to our hosts.

Despite this we did see both spiritual and clinical success. A half hour session that I was leading midway through the hospital course was expanded to a whole morning (as I led it) and this allowed me to really start to get alongside the students and I was just so grateful to God when at the end of the morning every one of the 34 students came forward for prayer and joined in the singing of *Amazing Grace* as the session closed.

Although a hard trip, the fellowship and love between those of us who had travelled to Zambia was deep and meaningful. So often the worldly response would have been to gossip and to backstab; instead the team members turned to prayer and responded with a love that was not our own and which resulted in the challenging of the team leader, making them aware of the conflict and distress being caused.

I am hopeful that my own organisation PRIME will be able to return to work alongside some of the domestic partner organisations in a more meaningful and ongoing relationship in the future. We continue to be prayerful that those who had been hurt receive healing and encouragement.

Thank you so very much for your prayers – they were essential in responding to the discord and distress encountered.

Tony Kemp



Baptism testimonials continued

It was about three and a half years ago, when I was looking for a new place to live. I had been living in Pembury Road in Tonbridge with my sister when our landlady had told us that she wanted to sell the house. A couple of weeks before moving out with no plans for what was going to happen next, I had heard about an Alpha course in a restaurant in Tonbridge, which sounded very appealing, and I decided to go along. It was there where I met my future landlord, who is now a very good friend and whom I asked to be my baptism sponsor.

After moving into the new house, there was a great feeling of peace present in the home that I had never felt before and I knew from that moment, I had allowed God to be in control of my life.

The reason that I decided to go for baptism reaffirmation is that I'm confident to say without a doubt, that I couldn't live without God in my life. I am grateful for what Jesus has done for me and the world. He has changed my thinking and continuously challenges me to engage in conversations with others. The power of God's Holy Spirit gives me great joy from the moment I wake up in the morning and eases my worries in everyday life, to know that I'm in his hands. He is my rock and protector.

Ben Sales