

March 2016—forthcoming events

Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat	Sun
Key to abbreviations: AAS = All Age Service HC = Holy Communion OE = Older Elements TMS = The Morning Service AT = Afternoon Tea HGL = Home Group Leaders PD = Prayer Day W2W = Woman to Woman BB = Bumps and Babes HotS = Healing on the Street SOW = Service of the Word WLTD = Who let the dads out CC = Community Centre LTF = Ladies Thursday Fellowship TES = The Evening Service YE = Younger Elements CG = Central Gathering MITM = Men in the morning TG = Thanksgiving						
	1	2	3	4	5	6
	9:00am Re:Fresh 4:00pm Blend 5:00pm YE 7:00pm OE	7:00am PD 10:00am BB 11:00am HC 7:30pm CG	10:00am LTF 10:00am MITM	9:00am Re:Fresh 9:30am W2W	9:00am Re:Fresh 10:00am HotS 7:00pm The Mix	7:45am HC 10:30am HC 11:00am HC at St Eanswythe's 6:30pm TES
7	8	9	10	11	12	13
	9:00am Re:Fresh 4:00pm Blend 5:00pm YE 7:00pm OE	10:00am BB 10:50am HC	10:00am MITM	9:00am Re:Fresh 9:30am W2W	9:30am Quiet Day 9:45am WLTD 10:00am HotS	7:45am HC 10:30am TMS 11:00am SOW at St Eanswythe's 6:30pm TES
14	15	16	17	18	19	20
	9:00am Re:Fresh 7:00pm OE	10:00am BB 11:00am HC 7:30pm Eric's Commissioning	10:00am MITM	9:00am Re:Fresh 9:30am W2W	9:00am Women's Breakfast 10:00am HotS 7:00pm The Mix	7:45am HC 10:30am Baptism 11:00am SOW at St Eanswythe's 2:30pm AT 6:30pm HC
21	22	23	24	25	26	27
	9:00am Re:Fresh 7:00pm OE	10:00am BB 11:00am HC	10:00am MITM	10:30am Good Friday Service 2:00pm Hour at the Cross	9:00am Re:Fresh 10:00am HotS	7:45am HC 9:15am TMS 10:30am HC 11:00am SOW at St Eanswythe's 6:30pm TES
28	29	30	31			
	9:00am Re:Fresh	11:00am HC	10:00am MITM			

The next chapter

For Norman and Mavis the last two months have sped by in a whirlwind of celebration, good wishes and hard work. Both were quite overwhelmed by their celebration service at St Stephen's on 19th January which was attended by around 450 friends and colleagues. "It was a wonderful blend of happy reflection and joyous worship," remembers Norman, "a memory to treasure."

With the sale of their Tonbridge Christian Bookshop to Christian Literature Crusade International (CLC) finalised, Norman and Mavis will close the door on over 34 years of trading on 5th March. The couple first moved to the Tonbridge area in 1973 and took over the bookshop in 1981. "Yes, would you believe it was April Fool's Day?" laughs

Facts & Figures

£15,000,000 goods sold
1,000,000 books sold
250,000 Bibles sold

Mavis. "The bookshop has, in many respects, been a labour of love and although hard work, we have always seen it as an extension of our own faith."

So what next for this busy pair? "Well for me," explains Norman, "the next few months are not so much about 'doing' as 'being'. Being a good father to our three sons and being the perfect grandfather to our six grandchildren! I think that for too long I have been defined by what I do and that is not what it's really about. I want it to be about what I am, not what I do." And for Mavis? "I will enjoy having much more time to spend in the garden as the weather gets better and yes, it's all about family and reflection for me too."



Encompass would like to wish Norman and Mavis a very long, fulfilled and happy retirement. It is wonderful that we will get to see them continuing with another longstanding association in Tonbridge - their 31 year relationship with St Stephen's.

ENC COMPASS

THE MONTHLY ST STEPHEN'S CHURCH NEWSLETTER



March 2016

Testimony time!

There are some words that many Christians seem to dislike – and the obvious one is evangelism (the dreaded 'e' word) and I think another may be testimony; but what do we mean by testimony?



The place to look is, of course, the Bible to see what this is and why it is important. Mark 1 has good examples. After Jesus healed a man with an evil spirit "News about him spread quickly over the whole region of Galilee..." (v28); by v37 the disciples exclaimed "...everyone is looking for you!" and by v45 we have "Jesus... stayed... in lonely places, yet the people still came to him from everywhere."

We could say that the above is just a response to Jesus - so it may be better to think about the church in Acts. The man at the temple gate was healed (chapter 3)...he went into the temple courts with Peter and John "...walking and leaping and praising God." His testimony wasn't spoken but demonstrated, and as a crowd gathered Peter took the opportunity to explain... and another 2000 men (with all their wives and families) were added to the number of believers: Acts 4: v4.

The testimonies of the people whose lives have been touched by Jesus, or by the power of Jesus through others, is clearly important to the growth of the church and encouraging to believers.

We all have a testimony – Jesus must have been working somewhere in our lives to bring us into his family; for us to have faith in him; for us to realise that we fall short of his holiness and need his help – salvation, forgiveness, restoration. Some of us also have stories of answered prayer that are more dramatic and stories of healing or God's guidance or addictions being broken or relationships restored... but we won't all have these immediate answers all the time.

When we look at how God works, we see him work in different time frames for us. When we eat our meals many of us thank God first; only he knows how the seed grows to

become the food on our plate and that happens over months and relies on God for sun and rain in season. We read of the feeding of the 5000 or hear of a pot of beans feeding 100 orphans in Africa. The same God and both ways of seeing him at work are a miracle.

When God works in our lives it is sometimes dramatic and sudden, sometimes slow, even over a lifetime.

We are all on a journey, we have all been transformed and we are all being transformed to become more like Christ and it's a long journey. There can be painful times and the Bible refers to being refined by fire, like silver or gold, to remove the impurities.

In my life sometimes God has worked in me very suddenly; healing of a painful knee or from whiplash, but he has usually worked in me over time. I see immediate answers to prayer – for people needing his touch or for my diary to be cleared – and I wait for years and years and I'm still waiting for other answers – like my prayers for my sister or some friends to find Jesus. But all these add together to make my testimony. I can't imagine anyone wants to hear all of it but I do try to use bits of it to help other people find Jesus in whatever they are going through. It's my story and hard for people to reject or argue with.



Sharing the gospel story – His story – can be harder. Have I got it right? Do I know it well enough? What if I can't answer their questions? Sharing my story is easy; I lived it, I know I was changed by it and I can see God at work in it.

By sharing our story we honour God and it's a way of thanking God for what he is doing in our lives. So please do share your story, or a bit of it, with anyone who will listen and as you give glory to God may you be blessed. When people share their stories in church it is often of the dramatic and instant. This is no more important than the slow and painful transformation – but for both we should give glory to God and rejoice. When Jesus walked here on earth he used these instant signs – miracles - to bring people to himself and grow the kingdom and I believe God still gives miracles to grow his kingdom.

Sheila Perkins

10 Things you might like to know about Eric & Anna (but might not like to ask)

While Eric, Anna and family were still knee-deep in snow and packing boxes back in the US, *Encompass* caught up with them to find out all about our new Associate Vicar and his wife. So here are 10 things that just might help you to get to know them a little better.



- 1** Eric and Anna both grew up in Annandale, Virginia, a suburb of Washington, DC. They met in German class at high school but Anna wouldn't date Eric because he wasn't a Christian. When he became a Christian some years later, he telephoned her and the rest is history.
- 2** Anna grew up Lutheran but didn't have a 'personal relationship with Jesus' until she was a teenager attending an Anglican (Episcopal Church) youth group. Eric gave his life to Christ as a young US Marine; it was the knowledge of the gospel that Anna had shared with him years before that helped him to do so.
- 3** Eric has been in ministry ever since he came to faith at 22 years old. "I remember thinking that, if this gospel is really true, how can I not give my whole life to the Lord and do whatever and go wherever He led," explains Eric. "I've been in ordained ministry since 2005 and done pretty much everything, from children and youth ministry to small group oversight to evangelism and mercy ministry."
- 4** Eric and Anna have four children: Aaron, 23, is serving his last of five years in the US Marines; Ian is 21 and enjoys music. He will probably attend West Kent College in September to earn his Access to HE certification; Collin is 16 and also enjoys music, but choral singing mostly. Finally, Lauren is 15 and she enjoys art, music and movies that make her think and cry.
- 5** Eric and Anna were attracted to St Stephen's by our church's life and ministry above all. "You have a wonderful balance of word and deed," Eric observes, "And we share that philosophy of ministry." St Stephen's is much less formal than their previous church, Truro Anglican Church in Fairfax County, Virginia. Here, Eric wore albs and vestments. Truro is also a little larger than St Stephen's, with around 1000 people attending each Sunday (spread across four services). However, Truro does not serve tea and coffee following the service!
- 6** Eric's favourite piece of scripture comes from St Paul's first letter to the Corinthians, chapter 9, verse 22-23: "To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some. I do it all for the sake of the gospel, that I may share with them in its blessings." Anna's choice is from Lamentations, chapter 3, verses 22-24: "The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. "The Lord is my portion," says my soul, therefore I will hope in him."
- 7** Favourite books: Eric has fond memories of reading, among others, the *Chronicles of Narnia* to the children when they were little. Anna loved *The Shack*.
- 8** Ideal holiday: is anywhere there are unique and interesting cultural and natural sites. They would love to visit the Alps, and the Roman and Greek ruins across Europe. Anna loves the beach and the sun (it was at this point that Eric expressed an interest in Hastings; *Encompass* didn't like to shatter his illusions about the beach or the sun here).
- 9** Favourite food: different types of ethnic foods. Both like curry and fish, especially wild salmon (hmm we're not too sure there is much wild salmon in Tonbridge).
- 10** Loves and loathes: Eric loves football (soccer not American football), hiking (anything outdoors), film, coffee and the odd beer; he is less keen on rap music, abusive people, and mosquitoes or ticks. Anna loves chocolate cake, puppies and fishing; loathes spiders, stomach flu and long, slow queues.

What have you given up for Lent?

And why did you give it up? Was it to break a bad habit? Or to lose weight? Or because your friends have and you wanted to show that you could too?

Perhaps you don't even know why, except that it's what

people do during lent isn't it?

But having done so, I hope you are now finding that the discipline of self-control has plenty of benefits of its own. It is one of the fruits of the Spirit; it helps us to be more self-aware, it promotes "perseverance" which builds character and gives hope (Rom 5:3), and leads us to become more Christ-like and loving (2 Peter 1:5-7).

Sheila Perkins

Book review

Surprised By Joy
by C S Lewis

This book has been described as a 'spiritual autobiography' in that it sets out to explain C S Lewis's journey to becoming a Christian, rather than tell his whole life story. It therefore focuses on his struggles with his faith throughout his childhood and younger years.

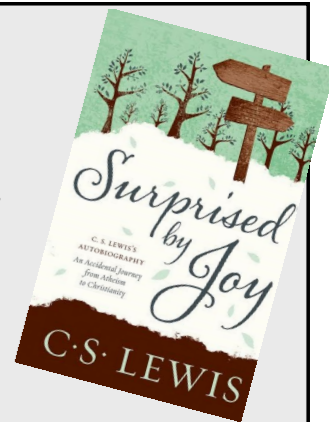
As he grew up during the first years of the twentieth century *Surprised by Joy* provides a fascinating insight into the life of a relatively privileged young man of that time who was sent away to boarding school from a young age, leading on to Oxford university. He also experienced difficult times including the loss of his mother, when he was very young, and fighting in the First World War as a teenager. Having been brought up in a Christian family the story shows how the lack of support and guidance from mature Christians led to him losing his faith at a very young age; a lesson for all parents. He eventually rediscovered it for himself through his own struggles with

the logic of faith, and his seeking of a satisfactory philosophical position on the existence or otherwise of God.

I found it a difficult and challenging book to read as Lewis' classical education and study of philosophy led him to use many references I did not necessarily understand. However, the description of his struggles against accepting an, eventually, undeniable God and the truth of the gospels gives comfort to those of us who still suffer doubt from time to time. This man went on to write some of the most famous and widely read Christian books of the twentieth century!

ISBN 978-0007461271
£8.99

Review by Carol Wake



Getting to know... Anne Knowles

Anne Knowles can regularly be seen on a Sunday at 10.30am singing with one of the St Stephen's worship groups; she is also a member of the Women on a

Mission organising team and leads a Wednesday evening Connect Group for 20s to 30s.



Not one to 'rest on her laurels', Anne also works full time for OMF* International UK, looking after the leadership team

and trustees, as well as running mini conferences four times a year for missionaries when they return from the field. *Encompass* met with Anne to find out...well how she fits it all in.

Anne, how do you manage a busy job and all that you do for St Stephen's?

I have no idea! I love what I do here and at work which motivates me to stay on top of it all. Plus James (my husband) is very supportive.

When did you and James first come to St Stephen's?

Five-ish years ago. We visited a few churches around Sevenoaks and Tonbridge and then James suggested St Stephen's. I eventually listened to him and we found everyone to be really welcoming - so we stayed.

How did you get involved in the worship groups?

There was an invitation announced in the notices section of the morning service for anyone interested to go along to the worship team get-together; so I went along and somehow managed to convince someone I could sing.

Had you done anything like this before?

I've always loved to sing and worship and found the

combination to be really powerful. I can't remember when I started singing, but in my teens I was encouraged to be part of a youth worship team which then turned into singing at main church services. It might not look like it, but I'm not naturally comfortable being on stage in front of people. However, I am learning to be obedient to God's call and to rely on Him each week so I can point the way to Him through worship.

Tell us about your Connect Group

James and I run a group for the 20s to 30s age-range in church every Wednesday night. We have around 12 amazing people in the group at the moment, but there is always room for more!

What about your work with Women on a Mission?

I am going to shamelessly plug Women on a Mission here. I am part of the organising team for women's events because we want to help women to come together to know God better, to know their fellow women in the church better and to have an outlet to better reach women in the community (that's a lot of 'betters', sorry!). All of this so more women can come to know their full potential in Christ.

What are your top three favourite worship songs?

Such a hard question (it changes almost daily); right now I am loving God of Miracles by Chris McClarney, In Awe of You by Jesus Culture and Ever Be by Bethel.

Do you have a favourite singer?

Again, this changes almost daily. At the moment I love Liz Vice, an up and coming gospel/60s soul style singer from Portland, Oregon.

Do you have any time for outside interests or hobbies?

I love spending weekends with my three incredible step-children, Seb, Izzy and Lottie, as well as entertaining my two crazy cocker spaniels; and sometimes I find time to sew.

*Overseas Missionary Fellowship