

THE MESSENGER

ONE MORE STEP ALONG THE WORLD I GO

By Maggie Holland



Just the mention of an airport sets my travel bug itching; not tedious queueing, nor jet lag, nor foul tea can dampen my enthusiasm to be up and away. Travel is exciting, stimulating and adventurous, allowing us to think more about our own culture by seeing others'.

As a Christian abroad, I've fallen on my feet in churches in Sydney, Hong Kong, Kasulu, Kuala Lumpur, Vientiane and Buenos Aires. I've found an immediate sense of belonging and a warm welcome to the stranger who belongs to God's universal family.

Frequently, I have found that my being a stranger can enable unspoken ideas to be verbalised and awkward questions asked of me. Am I being like Christ? What do I think about abortion? How do I serve the poor? Is all the west decadent? What do I think of Paradise Lost? Questions so often open up the complexities of personal and social ethics which confront us today.

God has given us a mind, a Bible to direct our thinking, the Holy Spirit to open the scriptures to us, and the Christian community to share our development. Living abroad as the new kid on the block gave me a chance to rethink aspects of my Christian faith through others who were also struggling to keep close to God.

UNITY IN DIVERSITY

We live in an era of global thinking - a more international approach to sharing our human desires and experiences. Of course, racial, national and social distinctions remain, but they should not divide us; I am encouraged by Saint Paul writing to the Galatians about divisions being transcended in the unity of the family of God. Travelling can show us a wider range of human experience and help us make meaning of life. How people love God and their neighbours shows in diverse and intriguing ways

At St Mary's Cathedral Kuala Lumpur, the vicar Revd Jason, a lively man of Indian extraction, heartily believed in building up the Church through social events; and he and his wife were the stars of a glorious Bollywood

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performance. Through these events and otherwise, church members are encouraged to be out in the community serving the less fortunate, including those from the majority Malays, who follow Islam. Such challenges are not everybody's idea of daily existence.

In Hong Kong, before the return to the motherland, a solemn funeral coming over the border was of a dissident whose preaching of God's love and stand for human rights had put him on the run from the Chinese authorities. Happily, on arrival, he leapt from the coffin into the arms of free Christians.

CHRISTIANITY AND CONFLICT

For almost three years I worked in the voluntary sector in Laos which is the least developed and most enigmatic country of former Indochine. I was employed by the Anglican Church in Singapore to teach English in the ARDA language centre in Vientiane which saw capability in English as a key input to developing the nation. Though most of the NGOs there are Christian, and Christian churches are permitted, proselytising is strictly forbidden by law and Lao Christians are regularly persecuted in many remoter areas. It's difficult to get at the truth in this enchanting land; people are warm and friendly and a joy to teach, yet police informers are in every class and politics are never discussed. ARDA now does more than just teach - abandoned children are cared for; a youth centre has been set up and support is given to disabled survivors of the civil war that ended 30 years ago. The Christian Church offers hope to Lao people through its revolutionary ideas of truth, love and concern for others.

I've also worked in Kuala Lumpur with Chin refugees from NW Burma where many have been raped, tortured and killed for their Christian beliefs. The young adults I worked with had been hunted by the Myanmar authorities because they dared to continue tertiary studies after all the universities were closed.

Both the Lao and the Chin Christians have such a love for God and a yearning to serve others that I felt humbled.

So take the risk when travelling; visit a church and encounter an aspect of the culture. You'll find that people will be keen to bring you into their lives and share your and their experiences.

Maggie is a teacher and member of St Michael's Church

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ON THE GRAPEVINE



Tim Keeler:
"Brought up to be a regular church-goer, becoming an adult took over and my faith in God was submerged in

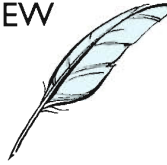
a life of study, work and then that of raising a family.

I didn't disbelieve, I just took my faith for granted, satisfied that although I was a Christian, there was no real need to participate in regular worship. Apart from the occasional carol service or wedding I didn't set foot in a church for thirty years or more.

Recently I became ill after returning from a trip abroad. While in hospital, I had a rather obvious and perfectly natural thought – that I didn't want to die. Whatever it was that I was suffering from, I had too many things left undone in my life before I was ready to depart this world.

And so I did something that I hadn't done in many years. I prayed to God that I might be restored to health. In praying I suddenly became aware that I was not alone and miserable anymore. It was an extraordinary, comforting feeling – one that felt like rebirth. As I recovered, I became aware that I was thinking much more clearly about what was important not just in my life but also the lives of those around me. Conversely I now realised that much of what I thought and did in my younger days was superficial and unimportant. I had learned that prayer not only brings one closer to God. It also brings one closer to the things that matter in our lives."

BOOK REVIEW



Rough crossings -
Britain, the slaves and
the American Revolution.

By Simon Schama

ISBN 0-06-053916-X

Reviewed by Elizabeth Wiggins

The book tells the story of the escaped slaves who responded to the promise of emancipation from the last British governor of Virginia and served on the British side during the War of American Independence. After the British defeat, the loyalists were taken to Nova Scotia where they suffered hardships in attempting to grow crops on poor land in a hostile climate. Abolitionists in London proposed the setting up of a free black state in Sierra Leone, and John Clarkson, a young naval lieutenant, was sent out to organise the transfer of the loyalists from Nova Scotia to Africa.

He became their passionate champion, overcoming all the obstacles, organising and accompanying the convoy which sailed in 1792, a voyage beset by storms and illness. The establishment of the young colony is described in fascinating detail. Tragically the corruption and capitalism of the Sierra Leone Company overturned the initial promise following John Clarkson's recall to London, breaking the offers of freedom and introducing a new white hierarchy.

Schama handles his broad canvas with clarity, and enlivens the picture with accounts of individuals and families, bringing graphically to life the hardships and difficulties, the successes and failures of the young colony.

St Michael & ALL ANGELS

PARISH WEEKEND

By Daphne Clifton

For about 30 years, the St Michael's Church family has enjoyed weekends in the country where we can make new friends, get to know each other better and explore local beauty spots as well as revisiting some of the truths of Christianity.

FRIDAY EVENING TO SUNDAY
8TH - 10TH MAY

Once again our venue will be Ashburnham Place, a former stately home 6 miles from Battle, deep in East Sussex. The house is set in 220 acres of grounds and there are 3 lakes laid out by Capability Brown with wonderful walks and a nature trail. The food is excellent and the cost of the weekend includes all meals and home-grown entertainment on Saturday night. Prices range from £27 for a day visitor to ensuite adult prices at £148 for the weekend. Bargain!

A family weekend, there is a safe and secure nursery area and cots can be provided. Young people will have their own programme and everyone will have access to the games room.

Leading our sessions on the theme "Kingdom Now!" will be Dave Steell, senior minister of the incredibly active and relevant church.co.uk in Waterloo.

St Michael's is a diverse group of people and we'll all be there, single, married, families, friends - don't be shy or wait to be asked to join in.... book early to avoid disappointment.

Call the Church Office (020 8852 1205) or Maggie Holland (020 8297 2411) for more information on how to join in. All Welcome!

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CROSSING CULTURES

By Francesca Stidston

As Christians we often recognise the needs of others but don't always know the best way to respond. Tearfund is a Christian relief and development agency that relies on the support of churches like ours to respond on our behalf to the most urgent and desperate needs of others.



One example of its most recent work is the appeal it has launched in response to renewed fighting in the Democratic Republic of Congo, which has seen an additional 250,000 people displaced.

Many of the displaced looked to the Christians for help, arriving at church members' doors looking for shelter and support. The church is doing all they can, but they themselves are very poor and struggling to survive.

Tearfund is supporting the efforts of local churches and working with three Christian partners to provide food, medicine, water, clothes and blankets to the most vulnerable – helping 75,000 people.

Most displaced people just want to go home and live in peace. They continue to pray that peace will return but for most, their experience of God is through the work of local Christians and Tearfund's partners, who show the love of Christ through acts of service and hospitality.

If you would like to give direct to this appeal, please visit www.tearfund.org

WORKING CAPITAL

By David Lane

There's currently a fashion for "1001 things before you die" books, DVDs and websites.

I recently came across a "1001 things to do before you die" website. The home page showcased number 879: Visit the Ancient City of Petra. A quick scan revealed that all the others were in a similar vein. Visit the Moai Statues of Easter Island. Visit the Mayan Ruins of Chichen Itza. You get the idea. The trumpet call is to go further, go more adventurous, go where your friends haven't been.

But surely on any list of things to do before you die - dare I say – there should be some more profound and lasting goals. What about:

Contribute to your Community?
Reconcile your Differences?
Reflect on your own Mortality?

At St Michael's, we believe in "making time for the things that matter". Whilst global travel is both edifying and fun, it shouldn't become a substitute for the things that really matter.



St Michael & ALL ANGELS

FROM THE REGISTERS

Funerals:

JANUARY

Jeremy Scutts

Joyce Mason

Doris Gibbins

Hazel Nelson

Beryl Sterling

IMPORTANT EVENTS

11 O'Clock Club

Wednesday 4 February

"A career of two halves" with a talk by Dr Desmond Thompson from the surgery in Lee Road.

Age Exchange Concert

Saturday 14 February

7pm at St Margaret's Lee, Age Exchange concert. Tickets available from the Age Exchange in Black-eath village

11 O'Clock Club

Wednesday 4 March

A hands-on demonstration of handbells by Sandra Winter

International Food Evening

Saturday 28 March.

An event for all ages in our Church Hall. There will be food from around the world -Spain, USA, Middle East Russia as well as entertainment. Would you like to cook or perform? Contact the office for details.

2009 Holiday Club 23 - 26 July

For children aged 4 - 11yrs
Booking details to follow.

Violence Intervention Project

Sponsor Sarah Ingram as she jumps from an aeroplane in aid of this SE3 project. Please visit: www.greenwichyfc.org.uk

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St Michael & ALL ANGELS

SERVICES IN FEBRUARY

Sunday 1st
10.30am The story of Elijah
6.30pm (HC) Esther - Be careful what you wish for

Sunday 8th
10.30am (HC) I am the resurrection and the life.
There will be an opportunity to receive prayer for healing during Communion.
6.30pm Making a difference - Christian Unions.

Sunday 15th
10.30am I am the way, the truth and the life.
5.00pm Raise the Praise
The story of Jonah.
A half hour service for Under 8s, followed by children's tea.
6.30pm (HC) Songs of experience - the Psalms

Sunday 22nd
9.00am (BCP)
10.30am (HC) I am the true vine.
6.30pm Songs in stone.

SERVICES IN MARCH

Services will follow the usual pattern, details of themes will be available on-line nearer the time. Visit www.se3.org.uk

HC = Holy Communion
BCP = Book of Common Prayer

PRAYER CALENDAR

Prayer is an important part of life at St Michael's Church and as part of our care for the community during the year, residents in each road within the Parish boundary will be prayed for.

In February we focus specifically on the following areas:
Birchmere Row
Fulthorp Road estate
Merryfield
Pond Close
Pond Road
Rocque Lane
Streetfield Mews

And in March:
Bennett Park
Blackheath Park - Western
Blackheath Village from top to bridge (East side)
Cresswell Park

Please take a full, daily prayer list from the back of the Church.

Our monthly, Church prayer meeting will be held at 8.15pm in the Church Hall on Thursday 5th February and Thursday 5th March. Please do join us - prayer matters and makes a difference.

If you have any specific requests for prayer or would like someone to listen and pray with you, please do contact Sandy Christie, our Vicar on 020 8852 5287. All calls will be treated in the strictest confidence.

COMPETITION

Congratulations to last months' Sudoku winner, Mark Grover - one of 8 entries.
The answers were a)8 b)1 c)1

	3			7		^a		
4			8				1	
		9			6	4		
9			5		3	1		
^b	4	1					3	
2			7		4	8		
		2			8	6		
7			6		^c		4	
	5			9				

Please email answers a, b and c, plus your contact details, to: editor@se3.org.uk by **19th** of the month of publication. If you would prefer to deliver your entry to the Church Office marked for the Editor's attention, a sealed envelope will be fine.

Please be assured that your contact details will only be used in connection with awarding you your £5 prize money.

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St Michael's: making time for the things that matter

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