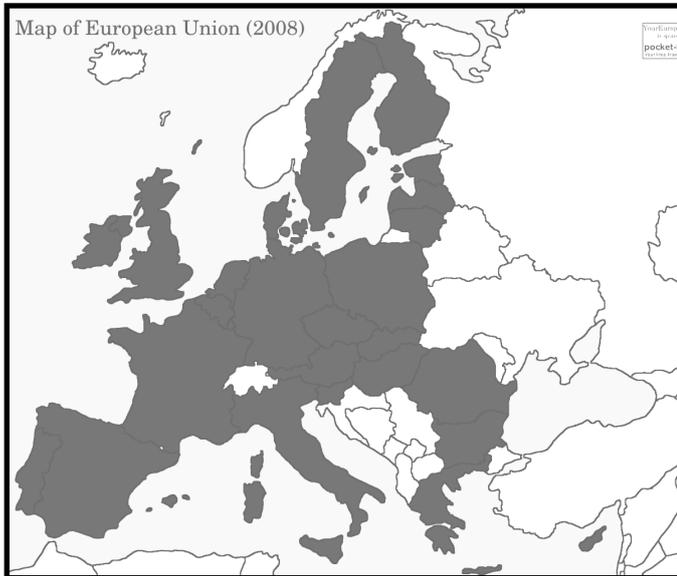


# THE MESSENGER



Union is fundamentally a grouping with Christian background. Christian values have also determined the political culture of Europe, where democracy is now the norm, and where human rights are centre stage, based on the Christian view that every life is precious, because *“all men and women are made in the image of God”*. The rule of law is based on Christian precepts.

## What has changed?

We now need to acknowledge the strange death of Christianity in Europe. In our lifetime Europe has become thoroughly secular, and attendance in churches has fallen dramatically. Christendom, once a name given to Christian Europe, has ebbed away. While we have been in decline, in the rest of the World Christian Church, in Latin America, in Africa and Asia, has blossomed and expanded with extraordinary speed. The church in China is now the largest Protestant Church in the world, with perhaps 100 million members. Also, the church in the southern hemisphere is now numerically greater than that in the northern.

The result, the Southern hemisphere churches are now sending missionaries to Europe, only a 100 years after missionaries were going in the other direction. Which continent in the world is now most in need of Christian evangelisation? Europe.

The British Social Attitudes Survey of 2013 showed that 51% of people surveyed ticked the “no religion” box, compared with 31% in 1983. In the same period those calling themselves Church of England fell from 40% to 16%.

It has recently been observed that ‘Christian belief’ benefits the individual, bringing hope and a real purpose in life. It also benefits society as a whole, as it provides a common framework of understanding and values that have stood the test of time, and a respect for each human being which protects the vulnerable and the poor. So this decline represents a real loss of social capital.

I spent five years as a trustee of ‘European Christian Mission’, a church planting organisation with 300 missionaries working across Europe, from France and Spain in the west to Greece and Bulgaria in the east. The question I ask myself is this; how is Christian revival going to come to this country and to the rest of Europe? My answer; only through prayer and a movement of God’s Spirit.

*Stephen Hingston*

## Mission to Europe

The New Testament book of Acts describes the start of the Christian church, beginning in Palestine and ultimately spreading to “the ends of the earth.”

The first Christians were Jews, then mainly through Paul’s work, the gospel spread to the Gentile, or non Jewish, world. In Jesus’s day, the world was that of the Roman Empire. Paul took the gospel to Asia Minor, modern Turkey, and then further to Rome. During the reign of the Emperor Constantine, from AD 306 to 337, Christianity became the dominant religion of his Empire.

### Early Churches around the Mediterranean

Rome was the centre of the Catholic Church, with a separate Orthodox Church in the east and a North African Church bordering the Mediterranean. Then came Luther and the Reformation in 1517 and onwards, establishing the Protestant church.

Europe became the centre of both Catholicism and Protestantism, and for the next 400 years or more its nations became the main home base for missionary society work in Africa, Asia, the Pacific and Latin America. Essentially, the flow was from European background societies to the rest of the world, from here to there.

In that period Europe was culturally Christian and now its art and music have deep Christian roots, as does its literature and languages. The European

## CHURCH SERVICES

St Michael's is a Church of England Church and during the PRISM refurbishment all Sunday services will be in the Church Halls.

Our main morning service is at 10.30am.

The first Sunday of the month is a shorter all age service, and on the other Sundays children leave for their own groups after about 15 minutes. There is a crèche for under 3's.

On the second and fourth Sunday of the month the service includes Communion.

The evening service is at 6.30pm and it is quieter and more reflective. Communion is celebrated on the first and third Sundays of the month.

There is a Book of Common Prayer Holy Communion service at 9am on the fourth Sunday of each month.

### 'Raise the Praise'

is on the third Sunday of the month at 5pm. It is a half hour service for small children and their families, which will return when the Church is re-opened.

### ASK, SEEK, KNOCK!

Why do we pray together at St Michael's? Because Jesus taught us to. He said "Ask and it will be given to you, seek and you will find, knock and the door will be opened to you".

#### FROM THE REGISTERS

BAPTISM:

April 14th: Rona McPhail



### PRISM update

The building works are on schedule to be completed by the end of July and we are hoping to move back in during August.

**Don't forget**, if you would like to sponsor a gargoyles, contact Stephen Hingston a.s.a.p. on 8852 3063. *Thank you.*



## ECO CHURCH

At St Michael's, we believe that taking up our responsibility to look after God's creation is an important part of our faith. For some time, we have been increasing our focus on green activities in the church, with two main aims, to be more mindful and reduce our eco footprint as a church, and to change our habits and be greener as individuals.

Over the last two years we have:

Celebrated what we already do. Green garden practices and eco choices in church purchases.

Encouraged better practices in the use of the halls, recycling and eco energy choices.

Held church activities around ecology. Vegetarian Harvest Lunch and walk to church Sundays

Promoted green choices for the congregation with monthly eco tips in the newsletter.

Planned for a greener future, eco conscious choices in the refurbishment of the church in the PRISM project.

What we have realized in the course of all these activities is that looking after God's creation makes so much more impact when we do it **together**. Each one of us can make a difference, but when we act together the change is palpable. We're practicing our call to live simply and lightly on the earth as Christians and the lifestyle is counter cultural. We need to encourage each other in our spiritual practice as people who are active and make a practical difference in society.

**With this in mind we are launching Eco Church**, a new initiative, with a new page on the website and a series of monthly campaigns which run from May to October flagged up. All of them are themed around reducing the use of plastic and consist of simple actions that we can do as individuals and community. This month we are looking at plastic associated with food purchases. The actions on the website are a link to a campaign on supermarket packaging to be signed, a Facebook group to join to swap plastic cutting tips and tips around shopping habits to implement. As a church we will be looking at the issue from a faith perspective, considering what we hang on to and rely on, and challenging ourselves to rely less on material goods and more upon our trust in the Creator.

Whether you are a member of St Michael's or not, these issues matter, to us, and to future generations. If we are complacent about our use of what we have been given, our ingratitude will do us and the planet a huge disservice. Thanks to programmes such as Blue Planet, awareness is growing. The challenge is what to do about it.

Whether you go to St Michael's or not, please visit <http://www.se3.org.uk/eco-church/> today and take part in the monthly campaign. **It's better when we do it together.**

Many thanks, *Hannah Chamberlain.*



**"I  
Can't  
Believe  
It"**

It's a month since I shaved my hair off for 'Bowel Cancer UK' and 'The British Heart Foundation', right here in the Church hall at St Michael's. We have now raised just over £3500!

It is safe to say I have learnt several things through this process such as there is never a right weather condition for a shaved head, it's either freezing cold without hair or you are worried about getting a sunburnt head!

But the real lesson I've learnt is how generous people are, particularly if you ask for help. I have been blown away by the generosity of those who not only donated money but their time and expertise to make this possible. So next time you need help, don't be afraid to ask for it, I bet you'll be blown away too. Thank you so much to everyone.

*Lauren Crisp-Hihn*

## **Fantastic!**

*Rather you than me.*



## **The Passion of Jesus**

Around 20,000 people gathered in Trafalgar Square at noon on Good Friday to see the Wintershall Players' free production 'The Passion of Jesus'. The weather was appalling, sleety rain hammered down without a break throughout.

Peeping through a sea of umbrellas and craning the neck gave an unexpected extra



dimension, making us feel more like the original crowd in Jerusalem, less like theatregoers. The one hundred actors in biblical costume carried on regardless. Some were 'sleeping' in puddles at Gethsemane.

Jesus and the two thieves were half naked much of the time in the bitter wind and they never missed a word, even knowing that they had a second performance, the rain did not stop.

The script is superb, mainly based on St John's Gospel but with additions to make clearer the political and social background, and in ninety minutes gave a lucid picture even to those who did not already know the story. Good amplification and vast screens meant that everyone could see, but it is much more about the sense of being there.

So, for me a high point was the one character out of costume, the young man in sweatshirt and baseball cap taken from the watchers to be Simon of Cyrene and carry the cross. This is not a semi-legend from the distant past: it is about us, here, today.

*Jonathan Causer*

**Save the Date**

**Holiday Club will be back!**

**26th - 29th July**



## Alison Giblett

### working with addicts in Ukraine

From its foundation in 1829 the congregation at St Michael's has supported and been enriched by international connections in different parts of the world through missionary and development charities. Its longest connection has been with the Church Mission Society, an agency committed to sharing Christian faith in action and in word.

It is through CMS that for more than two decades St Michael's has been linked with Christians working with people suffering from addictions. First it was with the Ibtida movement in Pakistan but now we support financially and pray for Alison Giblett working in the Ukraine.

Due to corruption, conflict, economic instability and high levels of drug and alcohol addiction, many Ukrainians struggle to find hope. Recent violent conflict in the East of the country has resulted in about two million being displaced.

Alison works with the International Substance Abuse and Addiction Coalition (ISAAC) part time, first in the Caucasus but now in Kiev from 2004.

In Ukraine she also leads the 'Genesis Ministry'. This helps people receive healing from God in the areas of life in which they have been wounded, freeing them to rely on him rather than on destructive habits. There are different levels of involvement and often those who have been released from their addictions participate in groups as volunteer helpers.

Although the number of courses varies, often two or three courses are held concurrently. At the present, they have four running at the same time and are having to turn people away to keep the group sizes effective.

The ministry has eight trainers who lead four-month support groups, that help people

identify things that are hindering their relationship with others and God. Prayer, scriptural confession, forgiveness, mutual support and practical action are all part of the healing process.

Last year they were joined by ten volunteers who wished to serve as small group helpers. One priority is to build up the team as they have more requests than they can fulfil. New helpers are shared between the two to three courses that we have running at any one time. Their presence makes the course more effective as each person has individual attention and the burden of personal explanation and care is not all on the trainers.

Alison reports about a recent course in Lvov. 'Vova, who also supports men in the Kiev groups, came to offer support in Lvov and whilst there grew in his ability to teach. We were pleasantly surprised at how well it went. The rehab centre that hosted us was able to accommodate the majority of students in their building in the countryside. This was a great blessing as it meant people were free to focus on the processes and had more time to pray and share with their Genesis partners.

About half of the 27 students were rehab and church leaders, so this course is very significant for the whole church. Best of all, we had eight couples, meaning that many marriages are being strengthened. On the last day, everyone testified to a measure of healing in different areas of their lives, including a few older ladies who had mostly looked sceptical.'

In her March letter she adds a PS: *'Thanks for God's clear grace being with us in Bogorodchany (near Ivano-Frankivsk) for the intensive 'Genesis' course. There was a healthy atmosphere of support and acceptance in the groups, despite only 17 people attending. Some testified that this was the first time they had experienced such an environment. Many people are receiving "aha" moments as they start to understand why certain situations are painful, or where their over-reactions come from. As we learn, understand and accept our own emotional reactions, it becomes much easier to understand and accept others.'*

John Clark.

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

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