

October to November 2019

THE MESSENGER

Transforming Formation

What do you expect of someone who represents the church? The immediate response might be: someone who is safe, who will not do any harm. It is a great tragedy that this has not always been the case. You might well expect them to be a woman or man of godly character, whose faith is borne out in their daily lives. If you turn up for a church service you would probably expect them to be competent in what they have to perform. And if you wanted to consult them on a difficult issue, you would probably expect them to have some knowledge or expertise, so that they could bring some spiritual insight to bear upon your circumstances.

This adds up to quite a lot to expect of one person, though not unreasonably so. Who are the people who can carry such character, competence and knowledge? Where do they come from? Well, they are by-and-large just ordinary churchgoers who have undergone some specialist training to equip them for their role in the church. St Augustine's College of Theology is the local institution that provides such training and education for those people taking on particular responsibilities in the life of the church. And its programmes are also open to anyone who wants to study theology, find out more about Christian faith, or develop their gifts. Its motto is 'Transforming Formation'. 'Formation' refers to the process of the whole person developing through their training. This is 'transforming' both for the person concerned and for those that they subsequently serve.

We were visited recently by the Rev'd Dr Simon Stocks, who is Senior Tutor at the College. Simon preached on the Gospel story of the man who exclaimed to Jesus 'I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!' He encouraged us all similarly to be willing to learn new things and seek deeper knowledge of God's ways. He encouraged us to exclaim 'I do know something; help me overcome my

ignorance or incompetence!' – and to consider how that might come about. He told us more about the College and how it operates: "Learning about Christian faith changes us; learning to live out that faith changes both us and the world. We are about forming people in a way that is transformational.



"The College has been providing non-residential theological education since 1959. Our community, dispersed across the South East, equips our students for the practical knowledge of God, the knowledge that changes things and makes its mark on us and those we serve. We provide formation that is transforming, that promotes personal, intellectual, and spiritual change, so that together we might "grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ" (Eph.4.15). We foster a community ethos in which learning is encouraged and supported, so that the changes it brings and the challenges it poses gladden the heart and move the will. As the first epistle of John puts it: since our lives are held in the gracious mystery of God, 'what we shall be is yet to be revealed' (1 John 3.2)."

The College's courses are university-accredited, delivered by a range of expert tutors and associated practitioners. They offer both part-time and full-time programmes as well as occasional workshops on specific topics. More information about the College at (www.staugustinescollege.ac.uk) and they welcome people to attend a taster session to find out more.

Rev'd Dr Simon Stocks

CHURCH SERVICES

St Michael's is a Church of England Church.

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.

Autumn Fair - Saturday 16 November (afternoon)

Yet again our band of enthusiastic volunteers are organising our annual very successful Autumn Fair. All the usual stalls will be there, our delicious home-made cakes, chutneys, jams will be on sale.

We shall have a raffle for a well-stocked and delicious Christmas Hamper. Tea and coffee will be served and there will be a plant stall, Christmas cards, book stalls, bric-a-brac stalls in abundance.

There will also be a stall selling homemade lavender and rose bags, hand printed T Shirts and cards in aid of the Children's Society. This fun for all the family with face painting and toy stall, so do put the date in your diary now.

What is it like to be a prison visitor?

As a prison visitor I am involved with two organisations – Prison Fellowship (whose aim is to transform the lives of prisoners) and Feltham Community Chaplaincy (who provide support for prisoners both inside and outside prison). The work is voluntary and therefore unpaid, albeit there are lots of salaried jobs in prisons.

So volunteers come into prisons to meet inmates, to help at chaplaincy services and to invigilate on special courses etc. Volunteers will do this on a part time basis for a variety of reasons. Both organisations have a Christian based ethos but motivations for helping prisoners can be secular as well as spiritual.



For me, there are several motivations beginning with God. As a Christian I want to help others and contribute in some way to the building of His Kingdom. Also, on a personal note, I know the "clock is ticking" for all of us. We only have a short time on this Earth so there is a feeling that I had better get on and do something. Equally, I think about what do we do about prisoners? Prisoners are incarcerated as a punishment but can come out and reoffend. About 60% do. Therefore, we should try and change the prisoner for the better and not to reoffend. So perhaps we can influence their attitudes so that they don't want to be inside and encourage them to become useful and productive members of society. Even leaving God out of it, it just makes sense!

So, what is volunteering in prisons like? The first thing to be aware of is that prisons are not the ordinary place that we are used to in everyday life. It is a place where people are held against their will and as punishment for crimes committed. The prison regime is strict and foreboding. Maybe you are used to prisons because you have visited prisons before or working in one but most people have to brace themselves for a culture shock. It is, however, like everything else in life – you get used to it. After a while, even the most sensitive of people, become familiar with the prison environment, the rules and the routine and are happy to visit. At Isis prison in Woolwich advice and instruction is given to volunteers by the chaplaincy so they know what to do and how to behave. Security is a non-negotiable point. As a volunteer you always obey the prison rules. If you break them you could be in serious trouble and bring the organisation you represent into disrepute. If you obey the old adage, "nothing in and nothing out", then you don't go wrong. When visiting you take in the minimum, leaving valuables and non-essentials in your car or in a locker. You will not give away any personal information to a prisoner, for example, where you live, where you work etc. *(continued across the page)*

Focusing on Prison Fellowship, there is a variety of work to do. You may help out at chaplaincy services. Anglican and Catholic services take place on Sunday mornings and at other times, for example, for bible study. You can also meet and talk with prisoners, find out about their needs and advise them. You receive training from the Prison Fellowship and the chaplaincy about how to engage with prisoners in an appropriate manner. You could be involved with "Angel Tree" which organises the buying, collecting and sending of gifts to the children of prisoners at Christmas. Or you could be a helper/invigilator/teacher on the "Sycamore Tree Course" – a restorative justice programme which runs once a week for a six-week cycle. It makes prisoners aware that there are victims to their crimes, how to say "sorry" and do differently (surveys indicate that restorative justice courses reduce reoffending by 50%). Or you could visit prisoners on the wings – getting to know them and their needs, problems and successes – encouraging them along the way. Now you might think that prisons and meeting prisoners is very depressing – but it is not! It can be at times but generally I find helping your fellow man an uplifting experience. Prisoners also have their own way of coping with their situation. Many can be very upbeat and quite happy to share a joke.

So, what can be the end result of all this volunteering? What effect will it have? The answer is, we may never know. What is firm for me is that by doing God's work "seeds" are sown. Seeds which may bear fruit and encourage and convince a prisoner to change their attitudes and lives for the better. The seed may take one minute to grow, or an hour, or a week or thirty years (or never). For me it does not matter – the work is done. On a purely practical level I know that prisoners greatly miss their nearest and dearest. Especially their mothers and, if they have any, their children. Once released they can easily go back to their old ways and end up back inside. But the thought of not seeing their mums (or other members of the family) or seeing their children grow up are paramount in the prisoners' minds. It is a great bargaining tool to encourage the prisoner to go straight. So good work may be done but perhaps the most subtle of all these good things is the fact that a volunteer comes into the prison to be with the prisoner. The volunteer has no prejudices, makes no judgements upon them but is just there to be with them. They are not even paid to do it. This goes a long way!

*If you want to know more, contact Bruce Pearce
07788501686.*

It was a great privilege to accompany Bruce and witness the final meeting of a 6-week Sycamore Tree course that had been run by The Prison Fellowship. I am not quite sure what I expected as although, of course, I did not know the crimes these men had committed I was rather nervous. Any fears or reservations vanished when 30 young men walked into the pleasant and well-appointed meeting room.

It became a heart wringing experience to listen to their testaments and their thoughts about the crimes they had committed and the hurt they have inflicted, not only on their victims, but of course the victim's families and also their own families. Perhaps for the first time the perpetrators had been brought to feel and think about other people and the outcome of their actions. They did not have to speak, but in fact by the end of the afternoon they had nearly all taken their turn to express their feelings and deep, deep regrets.

The following testament was given to me by Thomas who has given me permission to publish it; I am sure that you will find it as moving and pertinent as I do. We must all wish Thomas a good future and hope and pray that he can find his way when he is released. He is eager to go to an open prison as soon as possible and to start his long and arduous journey to salvation and to a better and fulfilled life. *Jane Bendall*

"I'm sorry for all the pain that I have caused
Not a day goes by that you aren't in my thoughts
I am using this time to now reflect on my crime
In the hope of one day salvation will be mine

I've now found my inner peace
Having found the Sycamore Tree
It's honestly changed the Person within me.
As I move forward, I hope you will see

I have changed my ways for the better of me.
Prison is not a place where I ever dreamt, I'd be
It has been a Long Sharp lesson, that has been Taught
to me

When the time comes and I am finally free....

Maybe in your heart

You will be able to forgive me?

Yours sincerely, Thomas"

Return of the local affordable art exhibition

St Michael and All Angels Church on Blackheath Park, is delighted to be hosting their next local affordable art exhibition, SMAG 6, in November. The previous exhibition saw 170 pieces on show by 68 local artists. Around 450 people attended and £2000 was raised for charity. The newly renovated St Michael's is a stunning location to showcase pieces of artwork and this exhibition will be bigger than ever. As well as the main exhibition downstairs, the upper galleries will be open to display A level and CGSE artwork from local schools, giving students the experience of displaying their work in a public exhibition



The local charities chosen this time include St Michael's renovation projects and AFRIL (action for refugees in Lewisham). Thursday 14th November will be the open evening with wine and music and many of the artists will be there. Other opening times are below. The weekends will have tea and coffee, and Saturday 16th is also St Michael's winter fair. Artists wishing to exhibit or anyone wishing to volunteer, please contact smag3@gmail.com or see SE3.org.uk/SMAG for further details." Everyone is most welcome.

Thursday 14 Nov	Opening evening 6pm to 9pm
Friday 15 Nov	4pm to 8pm
Sat-Sun 16-17 Nov	Midday to 7pm
Sunday 17 Nov	Midday to 4pm
Mon-Fri 18-22 Nov	4pm to 8pm
Saturday 23 Nov	Midday to 6pm

St Michael
& ALL ANGELS
Blackheath Park

Swop Shop

Claire and Jess, two local mums, were so fed up with packaging littering the streets, parks, countryside and beaches that they decided to do something about it. They are trying hard to reduce unnecessary packaging from their lives and realised they needed a local one-stop shop that means we can all Shop Without Packaging

That's why they opened a brand new zero-waste shop, selling food, groceries and household products without packaging. Their ethos means they only buy organic, Fairtrade, local (where possible) and as ethically sourced as possible. All produce is vegetarian or vegan.

The shop has all the dried loose grains, seeds, beans, pulses & nuts that you can imagine (housed in hygienic gravity dispensers). They also stock coffee beans, loose leaf tea and fruit and veg, unwrapped bread & patisserie, detergent & cleaning refills, shampoos and beauty products as well as other products to help you achieve a low waste lifestyle. ALL PLASTIC FREE. If they don't stock it, request it and they'll do their best to source it.



Shopping against the backdrop of glass jars, wood countertops and steel accents isn't just the future for the environment, it makes for an enjoyable shopping experience and could not be more in contrast to the large supermarket opposite. You can find them at 7 Burnt Ash Road, Lee Green, London SE12 8RG or email them at zerowaste@swop.market

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

St Michael &
All Angels Church
1 Pond Road
Blackheath Park
London SE3 9JL
www.se3.org.uk

Vicar
Rev Sandy Christie
2 Pond Road
London SE3 9JL
020 8852 5287
ar.christie@outlook.com

Curate
Timothy Ajayi
020 3673 7595
ajayitimothy@yahoo.com

Administrator
Marion Lane
020 8852 1205
church@se3.org.uk

Youth Minister
Lauren Crisp-Hihn
[laurenhubbick@
hotmail.com](mailto:laurenhubbick@hotmail.com)

Editor
Jane Bendall
editor@se3.org.uk