

CHURCH OF ST MARY THE VIRGIN STEVINGTON

August 2011 Newsletter



<u>August Services</u>			
7 th August	9.30 am	<i>Holy Communion</i>	7 th Sunday after Trinity
14 th August	9.30 am	<i>Holy Communion</i>	8 th Sunday after Trinity
21 st August	9.30 am	<i>Holy Communion</i>	9 th Sunday after Trinity
28 th August	6.00 pm	<i>Evensong</i>	10 th Sunday after Trinity

Dear Friends,

Suffering

The past couple of weeks has seen many people going through some terrible suffering in one form or another, suffering that I hope and pray we, you and I, will be spared.

Since the world began it has been changing as knowledge increased, but if there is one thing that has not changed it is suffering. The majority of people quite naturally look upon suffering in a negative way as something out of which nothing good can come, but is that strictly true? As Christians we should be positive in as much that at times of suffering our faith is put to the test.

The problem with faith is that it cannot be proved, so what seems to our minds to be logical and right can be easily accepted, what does not presents much greater problems. Nowhere is this truer than in the problem of pain and suffering.

Recently we have the dreadful tragedy of so many people, many of them young people being killed in the bombing and shootings in Norway. Then we have the appalling scenes from East Africa where children are dying because there is nothing to eat or drink or there is no medication.

Why? Why? It is exactly these sorts of tragic events that have caused problems to people who would like to believe, as they try to understand how an all-loving, all-merciful God can permit so much cruelty and pain to continue. How can such terrible events be equated with a just, good and loving God? There are no easy answers.

First of all we should remember that not all suffering is a mystery, some can be understood. We have all been created with a free will, unfortunately this freedom is sometimes used wrongly, for instance as a result of weaknesses, drug addiction and the habitual drinker being examples. Amy Winehouse was a gifted singer, her death a needless tragedy.

Suffering can be the result of other people, such as that caused by being injured by a drunken driver, children who suffer through being bullied at school or being abused by parents and others.

However some suffering can lead to good, it can help people face reality. For example a slight heart attack can warn a person to take it easier in the future. The reckless driver who escapes with minor injuries may hopefully improve his driving habits.

Some suffering can inspire others, as the wheel-bound competitors taking part in the London Marathon. However, although we can justify some suffering in some instances, the question still remains – why is there pain and suffering.

To answer that we have to turn to Christ, who without sin had to die, murdered at the early age of thirty-three. So as suffering lies at the heart of life, for the Christian the cross lies at the heart of our faith. God in Christ actually experienced for himself all the problems of physical and mental agony, of loneliness, of desertion by his friends; of frustration and lack of understanding of why he had to die. Jesus not only understands and empathises with us in our sufferings, he experienced them.

The Agony in the Garden of Gethsemane holds the key to the Christian understanding of this problem. Here we see Jesus wrestling with exactly the questions we want to ask – Why me? Why my son? Why my wife? Why my husband? As regards our Lord at that moment in Gethsemane, I would suggest he did not want to die at such a young age any more than we do.

Perhaps he could not see how dying could achieve as much as living. You will remember what he said in Gethsemane, “Father if it be your will take this cup from me”. Yet in the end after much wrestling with himself and with God, he was able to make the act of faith, “Yet not my will but thine be done”.

From that moment of acceptance of faith, it was all changed. Jesus still did not understand why God wanted it that way, but he knew that it was part of God’s loving plan for himself and for the whole world. So he went forward and discovered life and triumph for himself as well as giving hope and salvation to others.

How then is this understanding of Christ’s way of the Cross communicated to us? Partly by our contemplation of Christ the broken man, offering his life in self-sacrifice. As we meet with times of suffering and sadness in daily life, so we can recall how Jesus too met suffering, yet used it as an opportunity for self-giving. If we bring our sufferings into union with Jesus and offer them to God, then we are sharing in his work of restoring the evil in the world to good.

I admit this may not be sufficient for some people, but what do you say to somebody whose wife, husband or child were killed by a fanatic, who feel desolate and overwhelmed, angry, bitter and raw.

In such cases I pray that the presence of God will somehow help them through what must seem a very long and dark tunnel to light at the other end.

Father Mac

From the Church Wardens

Following on from the tragic events of the past few weeks, Father Mac’s sermon at Evensong this past month focussed on the complex subject of reconciling human suffering with our Christian faith. I prevailed upon him to précis his sermon for this issue of the newsletter so that it can be shared with you all. I am most grateful to him for his speedy response.

The week-end of September 10th / 11th promises to be memorable. In addition to the licensing by the Bishop of St Albans of Canon Peter Mackenzie at All Saints church Turvey on the Saturday, we have the Annual Bike ‘n Hike and a Classical Concert in St Mary’s Church in the evening. On the Sunday morning Bishop Richard of Bedford will be conducting a service of welcome for Canon Peter.

As mentioned by Bob Hart under the heading “Bike ‘n Hike”, half the proceeds from sponsorship go to the Church and the other half to the Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire Historic Churches Trust. The Historic Churches Trust have made us an offer of £2,000 towards the cost of our Toilet and Kitchenette – a very good reason to improve on our sponsorship of £0 last year.

Every good wish to you all.

Bob Westwood

Toilet and Kitchenette

Final checks are being made by the Church Architect on the two most competitive quotations for the construction of the toilet and refreshment facilities. It is hoped that construction will commence in September, as soon as possible after Canon Peter’s welcome service on 11th September. The work is expected to take five weeks from commencement.

PCC Meeting Monday 8th August

In view of all that is taking place at the present time, an additional PCC meeting has been called for Monday 8th August. If you have anything that you would like raised, please let the Secretary, Sylvia Goddard, Bob Westwood or Tricia Lennie know.

Bike 'n Hike Saturday 10th September

Anyone interested in taking part in this year's sponsored Bike 'n Hike, please contact me (telephone 823769) for a list of churches that will be open on the day and for entry/sponsor forms.

- **It is fun**
- **It never (well, hardly ever) rains on the 2nd Saturday in September**
- **You call into as many (or few) churches as you wish**
- **It doesn't have to take from 10.00 am to 6.00 pm**
- **Half the money raised comes back to St Mary's, the rest stays with the Historic Churches Trust for grant- giving**
- **There are pubs en route.**

Bob Hart (St Mary's Bike 'n Hike Co-ordinator)

- 1 Church helpers can be sponsored too.
- 2 For the first time this year *Just Giving* (online sponsorship) is available, which makes it so much easier to approach friends and colleagues for sponsorship as it can all be done electronically without the potential embarrassment of approaching people. Just remember to mention Stevington as your church.

Chrissie Galley (Sharnbrook Deanery Co-ordinator)

Friends of St Mary's – Mrs Cattermole's Tea Party

It seems particularly fitting that Stevington should hold a Tea Party, as I learned on the day that not only did a bygone peckish Duchess of Bedford invent afternoon tea, but also that Mr. Pendlington of West End is the genius behind the design of the pyramidal teabag! Thank you to everyone who supported Barbara's tea party: those of you who came to enjoy a wonderful sunny afternoon tea; everyone who donated mouth-watering cakes (and juicy cucumbers); the hardworking helpers in the kitchen and front-of-house. Barbara and Brian were very generous to offer their garden for the day and it was so successful that we would love to do it again next year. Wouldn't it be wonderful if we could rely on having that glorious weather? A magnificent £462.40 was raised towards the funds required to begin the refurbishment of the Church Room.

Chrissie Galley
Chairman, Friends of St. Mary's

Church Cleaning Rota

The volunteers for Church Cleaning in August are Tricia Lennie and Heather Eadie.

Useful Contacts

PCC Secretary:	Sylvia Goddard	01234 822130
Treasurer:	Alison Campion	01234 826352
Church Warden:	Bob Westwood	01234 822648
Assistant Church Warden:	Tricia Lennie	01234 825169
Church Hall Bookings:	Maggie Reeves	01234 823091
Visiting Ministers:	Rev. L R Macdonald	01234 782849
	Rev. E Royden	01234 294496
	Rev. Jo Spray	01234 713726