



“Imagine someone holding forth on biology whose only knowledge of the subject is the Book of British Birds, and you have a rough idea of what it feels like to read Richard Dawkins on theology”. A distinguished professor said that about ‘The God Delusion’ which glares at you from the buy-one-get-one-free stall at Waterstones. My friend bought one at Edinburgh Airport a couple of weeks ago and I know he can’t wait to bait me with it. How daunted are we by atheistic attacks on our religion and are we armed to defend them? Many critics say there is not much substance to Dawkins’ arguments and there is really nothing to fear. Some Christians actually welcome books like *The God Delusion* because they actually provide an opportunity to bring Christianity into public conversation. As Alister McGrath concludes, “Might the book actually backfire and end up persuading people that atheism is just as intolerant, doctrinaire and disagreeable as the worst that religion can offer?”

We live in a time when it is fair game to attack Christianity whilst virtually everyone takes great care not to attack Islam. Perhaps a more pernicious attack on Christianity comes from Phillip Pullman because he aims at a young and impressionable audience and rides on the success of the Harry Potter books. The children’s trilogy ‘His Dark Materials’ has his heroine Eve pitted against an evil God and his evil Church. Children have always been fascinated by figures of darkness in these books of fantasy and I can feel the draw myself. But then I think of the evil wizards Stalin, Mao, Hitler and Pol Pot and the fascination fades. Although Dawkins may assert that religion is the root of war and dissent, dreadful crimes have been committed in the name of secular faiths. Let’s be well armed to defend our faith wherever we can.

Alan Wheeler



## Care Time



In May, Brian and Janet visited **Dorothy Oswald** in Bognor Regis on her 90th birthday. She sends her love to everyone and thanks you all for your good wishes on her birthday. She hopes to visit Stansted soon. Betty spoke to **Lydia Rapkin** recently and she sends her love. She asked after everyone and was interested to know how the church is doing. Lydia was our first female minister, she is remembered with great affection. She is not able to get out much but usually attends the URC in Newport. She is always pleased to see people, so if you are going to be in Walden and have a little time to spare, do give her a ring and pop in and see her.

Needing our prayers at this time are: **Marilyn and Raymond Platts** and their children David and Jane, formerly of Chapel Hill and now in Shropshire - Raymond has been diagnosed with terminal cancer; **Katherine Hurford** (Quakers) who had an operation at the end of May; **Bessie Armitage** who is in hospital after a fall at her son's home in Scotland - no broken bones just shock and bruising, but as we know Bessie went to Scotland to be with her family as she was not well, and extensive tests to find a cause have all been negative.

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The next edition of **Imagine** will be available on Sunday 29th June. Please submit articles by Friday 13th June to: [news@stanstedfreechurch.org.uk](mailto:news@stanstedfreechurch.org.uk).

Alternatively, please pass to one of the editors, or send to 23A Bentfield Road, Stansted CM24 8HP. Thank you.

Editors: Alan Wheeler and Mike & Marion Dyer

**Copies of this and previous editions of Imagine can be found on our website [www.stanstedfreechurch.org.uk](http://www.stanstedfreechurch.org.uk)**

# What's on in June

## Sunday Worship at Stansted Free Church

1. 10.30 am The Worship Team – a fresh look at The Beatitudes  
2.30 pm Rev Stuart Veitch  
followed by tea in the foyer - all welcome
8. 10.30 am Rev David Mullins
15. 10.30 am Rev Allen Morton - Holy Communion
22. 10.30 am Christine Heyhoe

## Other Activities

Sun 1. 3.30 pm Outreach Tea

Mon 2. 6.00 pm Pilots in the Hall  
8.00 pm Shalom at 7 Blythwood Gardens  
Quaker Hot Pot

Sun 15. 11.00 am Fun Run at Bentfield Green  
2.00 pm Chrishall Methodist Open Afternoon

Mon 16. 2.30 pm Monday Club in the Hall  
6.00 pm Pilots in the Hall

Thu 19. 10.00 am Church Oversight Group in the Foyer

Mon 23. 8.00 pm Shalom at 7 Blythwood Gardens  
Bible Study with Rev Trevor Sands

Mon 30. 6.00 pm Pilots in the Hall

### Islands of Prayer

Sat 6th September 10 am - 4 pm Chrishall Methodist Church  
Music, prayers and readings led by Brenda & Stuart Veitch

## From the Secretary

Please remember that Friday is both David's and Allen's day off so only contact them on that day if it is absolutely essential. If you know of anyone who is unwell or who has problems that needs a minister's attention please contact Janet Townsend, who will then pass on the details to the ministers. This will ensure that David and Allen are not contacted by several people about the same matter and also avoid the situation when everyone thinks that 'someone else' has told them and no one has! This doesn't, of course, mean that you cannot contact one of the ministers yourself if you need to; they will always be pleased to hear from any of us, but preferably not on Fridays! Betty

## Induction of Rev Allen Morton

The interregnum is finished, the meetings of the vacancy committee are over and Allen Morton has been inducted into the pastorate as our URC minister. We are very pleased to have Allen and Daphne with us.. For those of you who didn't manage to get to the induction, it was a wonderful and happy occasion. There was a bit of a hiccough just before the service began as there was a power cut, which meant no organ, no electric piano, and no loud speaker system!! Fortunately our music group had been playing before the service and by using the battery on Marion's keyboard, were able to lead the service for the first hymn, albeit without any amplification. The moderator had announced that the clergy would have to remember their training and speak without the benefit of microphones, and we were told that the power would not be restored before 6pm! However just before the second hymn the lights flickered and power was restored, so all was well. It was a very moving service with many people taking part. Allen was welcomed by representatives of the local churches in Stortford and Stansted, as well as by the leader of East Herts DC, and Catherine Dean as Chair of Uttlesford DC. In true URC fashion there was a splendid tea in the hall afterwards.

Betty



As I write, the Induction service is still very fresh in my mind as a truly inspirational occasion. The Stansted Music Group certainly came into its own, particularly when the power failed twenty minutes before the service started, putting out of action both Water

Lane's organ and electric piano! Everyone was very grateful to the music group for ably rescuing the situation by accompanying the opening hymn, as well as by continuing the introductory playing before worship. Just before the second hymn was announced the lights came on again, the power was restored! We might say that a greater power was at work in that moment.

My friend Rev Ken Dunstan from Southminster preached on what a minister is for and how the people of God, the church, are together with the minister, to work for God's kingdom. Below is a summary of his message for those who may not have been able to be at the service, and to give others a chance to recall the essence of what he said.



The minister, said Ken, has to be a seer as much as a shepherd, needing to see the vision of the Kingdom of God, discerning what God is doing in the world, to tell about and invite the church into the exciting possibilities of what God is offering and asking. 'Receiving

the vision of God's kingdom, seeing what God is up to here and now, and joining in: there is an RSJ to support a ministry – receive, see, join!'

Turning the focus from what the minister is for, Ken went on to talk about the church's role in a ministry. Quoting the Epistle of Peter, he said:

'Above all, hold unfailing your love for one another, for love covers a multitude of sins.' In that brief Ken included

the minister, asking that the church look out for the minister as much as they would any other member of the church; the minister too is a part of the church. Like Jesus, ministers too need a leadership team, seeking support while wrestling with decisions. 'We are called to collaboration'.

In that call to hold one another in unfailing love, Ken included unity. Jesus prayed that we may all be one as he and the Father were one in heart and mind, the reason being, as Jesus himself prayed, that the world may believe that Jesus was sent from the Father. Love and unity must be upheld if our mission is to succeed.

**Amen to that!**



Allen Morton

## From the Minister

As readers can well imagine, Daphne and I very much look forward to living in Bishop's Stortford once the purchase and redecoration of the new manse is completed. Getting to know our church families at Water Lane and Stansted Free Church will be so much easier! The return trip from Burnham is three hours, so until then, apart from taking services, I will attend essential meetings, while David Mullins kindly holds the fort.

Meanwhile, we have started to get to know the congregations, especially with the help of the extremely useful photographic registers of who's who in the church. My first Sunday at Stansted I took the photo folder around with me during coffee time after worship, putting names to faces. The Old Testament Bible reading for 25 May tells us God has written our names on the palms of his hands - indelibly! I can't say I'll be writing on my palms, but over time and through regularly meeting and talking with you your names will stick in my mind - eventually!

Some folk will have already realised that I try my hand with an art brush, having brought a piece of my work into the sermon for Trinity Sunday. Among my other pleasures are bird watching, walking, cycling, gardening, and listening to classical music. Daphne, who is a more knowledgeable gardener than me, also knits all our jumpers and cardigans, and makes lots of marmalade - which I enjoy eating! Our two daughters left the family nest a good while ago. Elaine, our eldest, lives in Leicester working as a Community Police Support Officer on a village beat. Her younger sister, Rosemary, is at Westcott House, Cambridge training for the Anglican priesthood, and is a graduate of the Royal Academy of Music.

Having just been inducted I am, of course, only beginning to get the feel of the churches, and starting to find out where each congregation is in its mission. Already there are some interesting issues for Stansted, such as the way communion is celebrated; about worship generally, as we try to both hold the traditional and be inventive; and the ordination of URC elders and inducting of deacons. I look forward to working with the church members, the Church Oversight Group, and my Methodist colleague, as to how we work through these matters in ways that are satisfying and take the church forward. We would not want to become too preoccupied with internal concerns so losing sight of what church is for. As Ken Dunstan reminded us at the induction it is about our finding out what God is doing in the world and joining with God there, as fellow workers with Christ, through the Holy Spirit who leads us.

*Allen Morton*

# Pilots

Meetings for this term Mondays 6 - 7.30 pm in the Hall.

2nd June News of Fairtrade - Brenda Veitch

16th June MAF Evening - Michelle King (local representative)

30th June Christian Aid - Catherine Dean (local representative)

14th July Jan & Roger with guide dog Ripper

## An Australian Evening

In May, Arthur and David Law gave an interesting presentation of some of their experiences whilst on holiday in Australia. Arthur explained to us about the origins of the boomerang and showed us some examples he had purchased. David gave us a very amusing demonstration with the Didgeridoo. He brought two instruments with him, one large and one slightly smaller. They were beautifully decorated and when played sounded very low in register. David asked the Pilots to think of an animal that might be found in Australia and he then made the appropriate sound through the Didgeridoo. We all enjoyed the demonstration and some Pilots tried to play the instruments with limited success. There was a Video and many interesting items about Australia to look at. David played his guitar and led us in singing from Power Praise. We had a great time and thank them very much. It was good to be joined by two Church Members. Everyone is welcome to join us at any time for any of our Pilot Evenings; it would help to bring the Pilots nearer to the Church family.

Our next meeting will be on Monday 2nd June, when Brenda Veitch will be telling us about Fairtrade.

Valerie 813433

*Westminster College, Cambridge*

*May 14th 2008*

*Dear Betty*

*Please convey my sincere gratitude to everyone at Stansted Free Church for the gift of Book Tokens you presented to me last Saturday, they will be well spent! I have enjoyed working with you through the vacancy as Interim Moderator and I pray every blessing on you all as Allen settles in to ministry among you. I shall keep in touch.*

*God bless you all,*

*Janet Tollington*



# **Stansted Free Church**

## **Methodist / URC**

**[www.stanstedfreechurch.org.uk](http://www.stanstedfreechurch.org.uk)**

### **Contacts**

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#### **Fairtrade**

Brenda Veitch

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### **Sunday Services**

#### **1st Sunday in each month**

10.30 am New Directions in Worship

*An informal, participative service for all ages*

2.30 pm Afternoon Worship

*followed by outreach tea*

#### **All other Sundays**

10.30 am Morning Worship

### **Children's Work**

#### **Alternate Mondays**

6 pm Pilots for children aged 5 - 18 years. Tel 813433