



## M A R C H   N E W S   A u t u m n   2 0 1 5

Dear Friends and Family,

Can I just say that we are SO grateful for the fact that people like you pray for us! As we undertake this pioneering ministry, we are constantly thrown back on the reality that

*Unless the Lord builds the house, the builders labour in vain. (Psalm 127:1a)*

This places prayer front and centre in all that we do.

Our Fresh Expression of Church project now has a name and a logo! We are called 'NEARER', with the tag-line 'NEARER to God, NEARER to each other'. The group meets every Wednesday evening in order to go deeper with God. We gather around God's word, share fun and fellowship, and pray for each other. On the second Sunday of the month we have an event which is designed for un- or de-churched people where they can encounter God in a relaxed and creative way.



Prayer continues to be our priority. Our latest venture is a 'Praying-In Strangers' prayer cycle. During the month of October we have been meeting on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays from 0800 to 0830 in order to ask God to bring new people into the churches of Birstall & Wanlip.

The group has participated in its first community event. We ran a stand at the Cedars Academy Opening Day celebrations. At this we had a prayer wall, where we invited people to write prayer requests that the group would then pray for.

We have received some encouraging responses to our prayers. The promised Primary School on the Hallam Fields estate IS NOW GOING TO BE BUILT! The £500k originally offered from the developers has been upwardly negotiated to £2.5 million! The school will also function as a community recreation centre with sports and leisure facilities provided. This will create a place where community can start to be built. The promised Community Meeting Hall is in

now in the final stages of legal wrangling over the size of the developer's financial contribution. Please continue to pray that God will overrule, and that we will have a really good quality meeting place on the estate.

Sharon and I were both licensed as 'Pioneer Ministers' to NEARER by the Bishop of Leicester at the cathedral on Saturday 10th October. The following morning saw us commissioned by the parish, which just happened to coincide with the Civic Service in St James, meaning that the Mayor, county and borough councillors and many local 'worthies' were present to participate in this special service!

Being in the Anglican world feels very comfortable to us, and we will formalise this relationship through our Confirmation to be held on 22nd November. It is very important for us to belong to the inherited church as we try to manage links between our congregation and the wider world!



We continue to be invited to serve in various ways within the diocese. This month we have been asked by one of the diocesan Pioneer Development Workers to assist him in running a training course for a Fresh Expression group in a nearby village. We will meet one evening a month with this group to help them work through a Mission Shaped Ministry training program. It is really good to have opportunity to meet people from other pioneering projects and to learn from their experiences.



Stephen has yet another(!) book published 'Fuel for Pilgrims - Volume Two', another collection of 40 meditations designed to give you 'fuel for your spiritual journey'! Now available to buy online in hardback, paperback and eBook formats (ideal Christmas present!).

Sharon has started her part-time job teaching English as a foreign language at a local Adult Education Centre about 10 minutes away. It is challenging at the moment, particularly the paperwork - she has been out of the education system here for a long time! But it's good to have the opportunity to share with many of her learners who are in the same position we found ourselves in in France. Please pray God would give her opportunities to have spiritual conversations with those she teaches. She was delighted to be licensed alongside Stephen,

and has her own development plan for her role, which now includes taking on a local Gospel choir....a great opportunity for community involvement, but again quite a challenge!

We are delighted to be able to tell you that our friend David Bjork's brain surgery seems to have been a total success - we praise God for this.

We would ask for prayer regarding a new car. We have a 16-year old Mazda MX5 which is great fun, but is not really practical as an only car. We could do with a 4-door car. One that would get us to France would be great, as we would love to return to see the boys in the future. The only sticking point (nothing new here!) is finance! Moving back to the UK wiped us out, and our living costs in the large house that we have to rent from the diocese are high. Please pray that God would release to us a reasonably-sized, reliable car in some way.

Please pray too that we manage our time and resources effectively. It's not always easy being in such a 'fluid' role, and we are still adapting to living and working in the same place, being based in our home. Things in the parish and diocese seem to be organised far in advance, with our diary now having dates in for 2017, and we find that very strange!

With our thanks for your continuing prayers and support. God bless you all.

**Stephen, Sharon, Ben, Josh, and Caleb**

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