

Re-arranged CFM: Sunday 19 February

Important information about our Church Family Meeting which has been re-arranged for Sunday 19 February following the morning service:

Agenda for the CFM

1) ReNew January:

We want to thank the church for their willingness to step out with us as leaders over the month of January and to try different things together. It has been good to refocus on Jesus, to receive and to be refreshed. It has also been encouraging to see the way God has led us, how a number of people have shared and contributed to the times together. We have had some feedback which has been really helpful but as we consider the future together we would like the whole church to have the opportunity to share in this process.

At the cancelled CFM on Sunday 5 February we were going to discuss the following questions:

- 1. What have you most enjoyed about the January ReNew and why? (Maybe choose three things?)*
- 2. What (if anything) would you like to see continue and why?*
- 3. Was there anything you didn't find easy and why?*
- 4. What do you think God was bringing to our attention as a church?*

If you could think through your responses to the above questions and write them down before the re-arranged CFM on Sunday 19th, then we can discuss together. If you know you can't make the Sunday CFM then please could you send us your responses beforehand?

As leaders we will then take away the feedback, pray, discuss and consider the future shape of our times together. We will pass on to the church our suggestions.

One of the things that God seems to have been communicating to us over the month of January has been the need for 'brokenness'. As there are many ways this can be understood we thought it would be helpful to try to define and describe what we believe God was saying to us (see below). Again this can be discussed at the CFM together.

2) Update on Finances. See attached notes.

3) 'Full Steam Ahead' Holiday club

We look forward to starting our first holiday club at VEC for a number of years in February half-term. Please pray for Alistair and Sue Mitchell, the team and the children that are coming. At the CFM we will have the opportunity to hear how it went.

4) Sevenoaks Christian Free School:

Where are we?

In a few days time the detailed proposal with parents' signatures will be passed on to the Government to consider the application. The next stage will be an interview process, and then we will get a good idea of the likely outcome in July and a final decision by October. If all goes well the school will hope to start in September 2013.

Why is this exciting?

There is an opportunity (many say unique and God-given) to change the educational map in this area, to offer a counter-cultural place of deep learning and to have a clear Christian values-based secondary school in this town. There is the chance to connect the good news of Jesus with a number of children who have not heard and might not hear otherwise.

What is VEC's involvement?

Along with a number of other churches (over 20) in this area we would be a member of a trust set up to oversee the running of the Christian Free School. As a leadership we agreed the following statement:

"The Trustees of Vine Evangelical Church (Sevenoaks) endorse the idea of setting up an Educational Trust in the Sevenoaks area to operate the proposed Christian Free School; and agree in principle that were such a Trust to be formed – and subject to our approval of its governing documents - this Church would wish to become a Member of the Trust through the most appropriate legal mechanism."

On Tuesday 21 February at a service at Chevening Church to dedicate this bid and the proposed school Simon will sign on behalf of VEC a letter of endorsement from the Sevenoaks churches which is to accompany the application to be recognised as an ecumenical Christian school.

What can I do?

- Pray
- Parents of Year 4 and 5 children please sign the petition – hard copies available, or online at www.sevenoakschristianschool.org.uk by February 14th
- Parents of any age children can sign a petition of support
- Publicise

Being broken...

In January as we have set time aside to renew our first love, to refocus on Jesus, to receive from Him and to allow Him to refresh us as a church and individually, one word, brokenness, has been mentioned by a number of people as God has prompted them. As leaders we think it is useful to seek to understand and reflect on what this word means.

Brokenness means coming to the end of my resources, recognising my standing before God, and how unable I am. It is being vulnerable and honest with myself about who I am and the needs I have, seeing myself in light of who God is, being humble and open before God. It is being ready to allow Him to do whatever it takes, whatever is needed, whatever He wants. Laying aside any plans, expectations, rights or control and accepting that nothing is about me and it is all about God.

Our brokenness is the condition we need to be aware of to know the power and strength of God to work in us and through us. The related word 'humility' and the consistent message through the whole of the Bible that '*God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble*' may also help us understand this term better. This state of 'brokenness' should be our normal state of being before God, and some of us, depending on our personalities, find this harder than others. One analogy could be breaking a horse in. It has been allowed to run wild with no restraints, but then someone needs to break it in order that it can be used for riding, carrying or pulling. Breaking it makes the horse responsive, and useable. It is not a question of this being a negative thing, but a necessary thing for the owner if it's going to be used. Without this breaking the horse will be wild and free but unusable.

It may be for some of us God has to do/allow/use something dramatic or traumatic to bring us to that point of brokenness because we are more wilful or stubborn.

Here are a few related thoughts:

As we contrast ourselves and see ourselves in the light of His holiness we are reminded of our sin, of our 'brokenness'. God reminds us of this human state in order that we move towards Him; we run to His grace and we are aware of how much we need His cleansing touch. As we are more aware of the depth of our sins, our brokenness and inability to mend ourselves it brings Jesus' finished work on the cross, the forgiveness He offers into sharper focus and should lead us, who have been forgiven so much, into loving so much in response (Luke 7:36)

In addition we believe that God longs for us as members of His church here at VEC to be more authentic and real with each other about how broken we are. We rarely confess our sins or the things we struggle with in a tradition like ours. We often can pretend that we are doing well; we can go through the motions and play church. When we allow our brokenness to come to the surface, when we allow ourselves to be seen broken and vulnerable before others God often steps in and uses that. It also helps others who constantly compare their inner lives with what they perceive when they see others' outer lives displayed and feel they don't match up.

We believe God has been speaking to the men at VEC in particular. There is so much pressure on men to come across as strong, responsible, macho, self-reliant and in control. We believe that God wants to emphasise to the men of VEC that it is okay to feel vulnerable, to feel inadequate; it is okay to feel you don't have everything sorted out; it is okay to come to the end of your own abilities, your own strength and allow God to father, lead and resource you.

We also believe that many need to be aware that their brokenness isn't a barrier to God using them. A number we believe count themselves out of being used by God because they mistakenly think they are not good enough or not as good as others (or their view of others). The Apostle Paul says:

"Brothers, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. ²⁷ But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. ²⁸ He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things—and the things that are not—to nullify the things that are, ²⁹ so that no-one may boast before him. ³⁰ It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption. ³¹ Therefore, as it is written: "Let him who boasts boast in the Lord." [1 Corinthians 1:26-31]

Finally these words for us collectively: the last verse from 'Men of faith': *'Rise up church with broken wings. Fill this place with songs again, of our God who reigns on high; by His grace again we'll fly'.* Together we rely on God, not ourselves, realising that we can't do anything in our own strength. When we are broken, weak and humble God's power and strength enable the church to function as the body of Christ. The glow-stick starts to shine brightly. On our own we cannot fly, we can simply stretch out our broken wings. It is only God's power and grace that can enable us to fly. [Isaiah 40:31]