



Imagine our embarrassment! Late! We were late, my guest and I, for the start of the race. The 'rescue' service is essential at the start of the dinghy racing in case of an accident. I was duly given a ticking off by the race officials. My guest thought they were quite mad. We had taken our time. We had not hurried. There was no wind! Nevertheless, it was Sunday and the race officials had a race to run. They arrived before the sailors, as had the other rescue crew.

The judges' boat was launched; a course was selected. At the usual point out on the lake, anchor was dropped and the start line laid out. They looked up at the tree tops. Still not a whisper of a breeze and yet the ten minute warning bellowed out as required. The five minute warning sounded but still complete hush, not a ripple on the lake! The race was started. There were just two things missing: a wind and....any competitors! The officials signalled a postponement.

And the point of my story? To illustrate how we are bound by forms and procedure. The correct procedure must be followed through, whatever happens! A break with the known, trusted and regular goes against the grain. It was the same in New Testament times. Imagine the irritation and disgust of the Pharisees. Not only did this man, Jesus, fail to follow their honoured procedures, he was making their way of life obsolete! Two thousand years later our God is still challenging the regular, the accepted, the tried and trusted procedures. Try and be prepared for it and watch for a God who will not be bound by any form or procedure.

William Frogley



Care Time



We send New Year greetings to all of our church family and especially to those who are unable to worship with us week by week because of age or sickness; you are in our thoughts and prayers.

We think particularly of Phyllis Harrison, who at the time of writing is 'resting' in Avocet Ward, Radwinter Road Hospital, Saffron Walden. She would be pleased to see her occasional visitors.

Prayer requests for the Sunday service

We invite you to use the prayer request slips in the foyer and hand in during the first hymn.

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The next edition of **Imagine** will be available on Sunday 25th January. Please submit articles by Friday 16th January to: 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

What's on in January

Sunday Worship at Stansted Free Church

4th	10.30 am	Rev Stuart Veitch
11th	10.30 am	Rev David Mullins Covenant Service & Holy Communion
18th	10.30 am	Rev Allen Morton – Preacher Rev Paul Wilkin
25th	10.30 am	Rev John Buxton

Morning worship is followed by coffee. All are welcome.

Other Activities

Sun 11th	11.30 am	Fairtrade goods on sale after service
Wed 14th	7.30 pm	Week of Prayer for Christian Unity Service at St John's Church
Thu 15th	9.30 am	Church Oversight Group at 7 Blythwood Gardens
Mon 19th	8.00 pm	Shalom in the Hall - Brian & Eileen Quinn
Mon 26th	6.00 pm	Pilots in the Hall
Wed 28th	7.30 pm	Churches Together in Stansted AGM in the Hall

Worship on the First Sunday in the Month

At the recent church meeting, there was healthy discussion about the services on the first Sunday of each month. Prior to becoming part of Stansted Free Church, the United Reformed Church held an afternoon service on the first Sunday – an arrangement which enabled them to have their minister to take a service at their church on more than just one Sunday each month.

Since the two churches joined, this pattern has continued, but in addition there has also been a more informal service in the morning on the first Sunday, led by the worship team. In total, around 20-25 people attend our Sunday worship, and it is recognised that having two services means that attendance at each of the services can be quite small on occasions. It was therefore agreed to hold just one service at 10.30 am in future; the type of service would alternate between the more traditional style (as on the other Sundays in the month) and a more informal style.

We hope that worshippers will support all our services, and we invite your feedback for discussion at the church meeting on 10th March.

A Covenant with God

On Sunday 11 January we will be sharing together in one of the most important and distinctive services within the Methodist tradition – the Covenant Service. There will be some in our congregation who are not very familiar with the service and so I share here something of its origins.

As you might expect the service goes back to John Wesley himself. Drawing on the Puritan tradition and the works of Joseph and Richard Alleine, Wesley devised a service in which Christians could embrace the challenges and joys of discipleship whilst knowing themselves loved and held in God's faithful care. The Biblical notion of 'covenant', so central to both Old and New Testaments, provided the framework in which an understanding of our life together under God could be worked out in worship, care and service.

Wesley drew on the metaphor of 'marriage' as a way of expressing that covenant relationship (cf. Ephesians 5.21-33) and his original covenant prayer involved taking Christ as "my Head and Husband, for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, for all times and conditions, to love, honour and obey thee before all others, and this to the death".

This prayer was subsequently modified, but the sense of total commitment and dedication to the God who in Christ gives himself to us unreservedly in love remains the centrepiece of the service. The prayer, said by millions of Methodists the world over at the start of each New Year, was prayed by Revd Dr Rowan Williams on his enthronement as Archbishop of Canterbury in 2003:

'I am no longer my own but yours.
Put me to what you will,
rank me with whom you will;
put me to doing,
put me to suffering;
let me be employed for you,
or laid aside for you,
exalted for you,
or brought low for you;
let me be full,
let me be empty,
let me have all things,

let me have nothing:
I freely and wholeheartedly yield all things
to your pleasure and disposal.
And now, glorious and blessed God,
Father, Son and Holy Spirit,
you are mine and I am yours.'

In Wesley's time, such was the importance of this service, that a great deal of personal spiritual preparation preceded it including a day's retreat with prayer and fasting and often an all night vigil. As with a marriage, this was not something to be entered upon 'lightly or without serious thought'!

Today, whilst some of Wesley's stringent means of preparation are no longer a feature of Methodist life, the service remains a vital ingredient of Methodist spirituality and one that is taken with great seriousness each year. The Methodist website says of the service and of the covenant prayer in particular,

'In our culture we tend to prize our ability to make decisions and choose our own path in life. It can feel very hard to give that up. But this prayer is like a love poem. It is about surrendering to God in love and joy.'

I look forward to sharing this service with you and to another year of growing together as God's people in faith, hope and love.

David Mullins

Church Christmas Giving



As usual, church members and friends were very generous at the Gift Service, donating breakfast goods, toiletries, socks, hats and scarves for the Whitechapel Mission.

Our Christmas Day and Christmas card offerings amounted to over £120, which has been sent to the Congo Appeal. In addition to this amount, a donation of £50 was sent from church funds when the appeal was first launched in November.

Understanding Worship: even helping to lead it??

If you are sufficiently interested in worship to want to get to know more about it - the various ingredients, including some not common in Methodist or URC worship, how they fit together, how worship can be resourced - then why not come along to the Worship Leader's course starting in January? Stuart Veitch will lead seven sessions that will cover all the above and a great deal more.

If you also feel called to become a Worship Leader you will have been fully prepared for that task, and if your request to be commissioned as a Worship Leader for your church is approved, you will have a new role to play in the worship life of your church. However, you do not have to feel called to a Worship Leader's role to take part.

So whatever your interest in worship -
Sign up! Sign up!
and we'll give you more details.

Sessions will be held monthly in our church on Thursday evenings at 8 pm. The first three sessions are planned for 15th January, 12th February and 12th March, but dates can be changed if we find a number of people cannot attend on a certain date. Please contact me for further details.

Stuart Veitch
worshipleadercourse@stanstedfreechurch.org.uk



The next Traidcraft stall will be after the service on Sunday 11th January. If you would like any fairtrade goods at other times, just give me a call.

Brenda
fairtrade@stanstedfreechurch.org.uk

The Wedding of Helen Gould & Darren Chopping

Church members and friends were delighted to witness the marriage of Helen and Darren at our church just before Christmas. This was the first wedding to be held in the church for many years. The service was conducted jointly by Rev Allen Morton and Rev David Simpson, former minister at the church.



The bridesmaids preparing to release the doves



Travelling by Fire Engine was certainly unusual!

Stansted Free Church

Methodist / URC

www.stanstedfreechurch.org.uk

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Sunday Service

10.30 am Morning Worship

Children's Work

Alternate Mondays 6 pm Pilots for children aged 5 - 18 years.

Valerie Trundle Tel 813433 Email: pilots@stanstedfreechurch.org.uk