

Living through loss

“My mum passed away after a brave fight against cancer. She was a lovely, caring person. She was sixty-four. It didn’t seem fair.” said Sally.

During the two years of treatment she had not stopped leading a full life. She was the heart of the family and Sally had a close relationship with her. “When she died, I could not think straight. I kept trying to find the sense in it all. Why her?” said Sally. “And I was angry with God.” At times the sadness was such that she could not even put her feelings into words to pray.

Sometimes we need others.

The Mustard Tree’s mid-week

small group, of which Sally is a part, was a real support for her. “I knew they were praying for me and my family even when I couldn’t,” she said. “And I always knew that God was there.”

Sally also found great comfort in knowing that her mother had found Jesus (after realizing that faith was about having a relationship with Jesus, not

I know God is there.

about church attendance). Her newfound faith changed her outlook on death and took away



Sally enjoying a game with the children

her fear of it.

Some have asked Sally if God is a crutch for her. “I’ll have it!” says Sally light-heartedly. “I am more secure when things go wrong because I know He is there,” says Sally. Maybe life is not about being so independent that we end up all alone, but about letting others in. Even God.

You are welcome to our...

Carol service

Sunday 23rd December 6 pm

Christmas Day family service

Tuesday 25th December 10 am

At Longwell Green Primary School

H O P E

Coming

SOON (page 3)

What a gift

(page 4)



Slum survivor



Ten thousand teenagers camping at the Royal Bath & West Showground to enjoy life, music and God. Jan and John Mark took six young people in August and had a great time.

“It was just a sea of teenagers singing and dancing and hearing motivational speakers. It really was amazing,” said John Mark. *After hours* had discos, jazz bands, cafes, cinema, a version of X factor... the list goes on.

During the day, youngsters enjoyed sports, seminars on rock music, identity, music and art.

Steph (17), went because her school friends said it was the most *amazing thing*. Having grown up a Christian, she saw at Soul Survivor the amount of fun and meaning the Christian life offers.

But people were also challenged to live a life that counts. “The turning point for me was realising that God really does love me, and that He has a purpose for my

life,” said Steph. Because Soul Survivor was not just about entertainment.

It was about making a difference.

One way this happened was by getting ten teenagers to live for the week in a slum they made out of old pallets, cardboard



and plastic sheet. They made things to sell so they could buy basic food. And they were interviewed throughout the week to help everyone understand what it was like to live like the poorest 1 billion in this world. The fourth day they were given five minutes notice before a JCB smashed their slum which they then had to rebuild before nightfall! Now youth groups all over the country are ‘slumming’ it for a weekend.



News in Brief

Children in Need: Sue (Stanhope Rd) is hosting Santa's grotto to raise money for Children in Need. Snowmen, child-sized wise men, handmade wooden reindeers, Christmas lights, and all things *Christmassy* help turn Sue's conservatory into a magical wonderland.



Lights... Story... Party! *The lights slowly went out as we sat around a flickering flame.* Thirty children imagined themselves in the deep rainforest of central Africa, waiting for the sun to rise again and the darkness to retreat. It was the Mustard Tree's alternative to Halloween. At the end of the story one little boy said “Can you tell us another story?” Only minutes before the children had been jumping around with crazy games, tasty prizes and lively songs.

Transatlantic life swap: We recently had chance to catch up with Rob and Liz, from the Mustard Tree, who are spending a year in Canada. “We have really felt God's hand at work in the smaller details; the children have adjusted well, we're making friends and Rob's journey to work is going well (14,000 km to date and just one meeting with the Ontario Police!),” said Liz.

Prison break



***B*lackbird singing in the dead of night... you were only waiting for this moment to be free, sang an ex-prisoner in a service at the Mustard Tree Community Church.**

There were poems and songs written by prisoners about the dark emptiness prisoners often feel. Ex-offenders talked of how they had found support, hope and a future through music and through Changing Tunes.

Changing Tunes is a Bristol based charity helping prisoners and ex-prisoners through music. Professional musicians work with groups of prisoners to teach music, to form bands, rehearse, perform and record CDs.

“Music has great power. It brings out an emotional response, helping to express feelings,” says a spokesperson for Changing Tunes. “Self-esteem grows as prisoners are able to perform and record their work.”

Through this, relationships are built, giving support and building trust. Regular concerts give prisoners something to aim at, and build support between ex-prisoners.

The statistics say a lot. “Ex-prisoners who have actively participated in the Changing Tunes programme have a re-conviction rate of between 10-15%, compared to the national average of 61%.” from www.changingtunes.org.uk.



in our villages, towns & cities

The churches in Longwell Green & Cadbury Heath are working together to offer HOPE to the local community in 2008.

We are joining churches across the UK in the first national initiative of its kind.

Until now the biggest initiatives were city-wide. Manchester in

street art, and countless other acts of kindness to help deprived communities, for a month.

What has the church ever done for me?

HOPE 08 is UK wide, and lasts the whole year. The year is divided into 5 sections starting with:

2000, London in 2005, ‘Love Bristol’ in 2006. Thousands of Christians, mostly young people, would clean streets, paint fences, run youth events, do

Fresh HOPE: Jan-Mar. There will be courses helping us all make a fresh start.

We will be offering the following courses:

- ⇒ How to drug proof your kids!
- ⇒ Parenting of 0-5s.
- ⇒ Parenting Teenagers.
- ⇒ I’m in debt get me out of here.
- ⇒ First Aid for the home.

During the rest of the year there will be a number of other events:

- ⇒ **Big HOPE:** Easter
- ⇒ **HOPE on the streets:** April/ May
- ⇒ **HOPE Explored:** September
- ⇒ **Gift of HOPE:** December

More information will follow in future editions of Branching Out.

What a gift!



The best gifts in life are free. But what are they? And what would you really want this Christmas?

Health, hope, love, nature, cuddles, life itself? These are gifts you cannot buy, but probably do want.

Parents often say their children are one of their most precious gifts. (Normally they then add something about them being hard work).

What is it about the gift of children that is unmatched by all the gifts that come in colourful wrapping?



"It's those moments where we connect, that are the best bits I suppose," said one mother. Others enjoy the playfulness and energy of children. "They are so full of life, discovering, laughing, playing, demanding..." And then there is the way they reflect us. "She's shown me so much about myself, it's scary," said another.

It seems children are designed to bring joy and change into our lives.

Christmas is a time we give and receive gifts. And Christmas is when we

remember God did the same. A baby given to a virgin, Mary. Over time she realised that this gift was not just for



her, but for the whole world. For this child was not just a baby boy, but God's only Son. God was trying to get through to us, by becoming one of us.

Mary's baby became the most influential person in history.

The best gifts are those that bring joy, hope and even life into our lives. The best gifts invite us to change, and become all we can be. Christmas is when we remember *the best gift*.

The Last Word

Everything that is done in the world is done by hope.

Martin Luther King



You are warmly invited to...

The Mustard Tree
Community Church

The United Church,
Bath Road



Carol Service - 6pm
Sunday 23rd at Longwell
Green Primary School
Christmas Day - 10am
at Longwell Green
Primary School



Sunday 23rd
Nativity Service - 9am
Christmas Eve
Crib Service - 4pm
Communion - 11pm
Christmas Day
Informal Communion - 10am