

CGSC Executive Committee:

Chairman Tony Cornfield
 Secretary Miranda Cormack
 Treasurer Rosemary Wakefield
 Executive Elaine Coupe
 Executive Rita Bennett
 Executive Vivienne Hall

Contact:
The Chairman on 01732 452062
 Or email
 Tony@7oaksvineyard.freeserve.co.uk
The Secretary on 01732 457230
 Or write to 17 Pontoise Close,
 Sevenoaks, Kent TN13 3ES

Churches Group for Social Concern - Aims:

To encourage the people of the churches in the application of their faith to everyday life in the community.

To draw the attention of member churches to current local needs and work in partnership with other agencies in an attempt to meet them.

To assist in thinking about ethical and moral issues, by initiating appropriate study projects and conferences.

When necessary it will arrange fundraising events.



Compassion

The Sevenoaks Churches Group for Social Concern Newsletter

Issue 12, Jan 2008

Community Interaction



Hope 2008 is the word of the moment in many church circles. It is a heart cry for the people of God to stand tall together, across denominational boundaries, to both proclaim and be Good News in our communities.

It's a national initiative, that aims to take forward ideas birthed at Message 2000 in Manchester and Soul in the City in London in 2004 . . . that if we all work together, across the nation, then focussed mission is possible, even in situations that had seemed impossible in the past.

Here in Sevenoaks, our Community Action Day launched in 2004, was a local response to these ideas, agreeing that you don't have to go to a big city, in order to serve your community.

Hope 2008 now takes these things forward and on to a new level, by bringing together community action, with evangelistic events, staged throughout the year, not just here and there, but everywhere round the country.

By the end of 2007, there were almost 1200 towns and villages throughout the UK expressing interest in participating in this initiative.

Ten churches in and around Sevenoaks are already working together to make it happen here.

Future plans and events

Spring Meeting

To investigate and discuss the possibility of initiating a **Debt Recovery Ministry**, through churches together, along the lines developed for Befrienders
 Guest Speaker: Graham Connell, Tonbridge Debt Advice Centre
 Venue: St Mary, Kippington Church Hall.
 Date: Tuesday 1st April
 Time: 7.45 for 8.00pm

A One Day Event to Help Develop a Community Café for Sevenoaks

Fri. 22nd Feb. 10.00am- 3.00pm at Sevenoaks Community Centre
 For information, contact Sevenoaks Area Mind: 01732 459558

Gifts and Donations

Gifts from churches or individuals to support the work of Befrienders or resource the magazine costs should be made payable to:
 Sevenoaks Churches Group for Social Concern, and sent to the Treasurer:
 81a Bradbourne Park Road, Sevenoaks, Kent TN13 3LQ
 Please indicate the intended purpose of the gift, so that it can be appropriately applied.



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"He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour"
 Luke 4 v 18b-19

Befrienders

What a privilege . . . I've just left a prayer meeting, and am overwhelmed at how well the Body of Christ is doing "Body Ministry" through Befrienders.

The team of Befrienders, some 30 people, come from 11 different churches. The funding for insurance, police checks, phone calls and expenses, comes in from local Christians and their churches. The venues and personnel for team meetings, training, supervision and prayer, come from local Christians and their churches.

We have heard how the team support one another . . . handing on from one Befriender to another when circumstances change . . . learning from one another's experiences, through appropriate supervised sharing . . . praying for one another.

This is love in action. Jesus said we are to love one another and to love our neighbours as ourselves. The Churches Together Befriending Scheme is following our Maker's instructions and bearing fruit . . . fruit that will last.

26th November 2007



Community Action Day - 26th May

Now part of the Hope 2008 initiative, our Community Action Day on Bank Holiday Monday 26th May is an opportunity to work with other Christians as part of a team, serving our community.

Ideally each church has a team coordinator, an individual who will be the point person, organising their team and liaising with the event organiser.

Does your church have a recognised contact person? If not could you do it . . . it's just liaising with other members of your fellowship to be available for 2 or 3 hours on the day.

There should be a broad variety of projects ranging from gardening to rubbish clearing to decorating, that will be of help to individuals, young families and community organisations.

How often do we get the opportunity to "walk the talk", to put into practice Jesus' words about loving our neighbours as ourselves in realistic helpful ways?

All we're asking is that followers of Jesus, give a couple of hours on Bank Holiday Monday 26th May to demonstrate the Father's love, in practical ways.

Please contact the co-ordinator on **01732 452062** to offer your services as team leader or to locate an existing team that you could join.

Child Contact Centres

Tony Cornfield

Family breakdown, separation and divorce are endemic in Britain today. With all the conflict so often involved, children can become the hidden victims, losing access to one of their parents.

In a recent conversation with Alison Gilmour, the Kent & Medway Domestic Violence Co-ordinator, I discovered that there is a serious shortage of local Supported Child Contact Centres—Neutral community venues with facilities to enable children to develop and maintain positive relationships with non-resident parents and other family members.

What about a local church, I thought? We often have underused buildings. We have caring people who, with a little training, might value the opportunity to support children and families . . . perhaps there are people who know what it's like, and would like to give back.

We remember what Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 1 v 3-4 below, and praise God for the opportunity to serve His Kingdom and His Cause.

³Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, ⁴who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God.

What are Child Contact Centres?

From a child...

"When Mum and Dad split up I was glad. The rowing stopped and Mum did not cry anymore. After a while though I began to miss my Dad. When I asked Mum she said it was best that I did not see him, as she didn't want him coming to the house. Dad must have missed me too because he went to a solicitor who arranged for us to meet at a Child Contact Centre. We have been meeting there for about six months and I always look forward to Saturday afternoons."

From a parent...

"I was shown into the hall... suddenly the boys came running to me... both shouting: Daddy! Daddy! Big hugs for each one. It was like a rugby scrum only for once I was crying. They had not forgotten me."

The National Association of Child Contact Centres, offers all sorts of resources to help with setup and maintenance of centres.

Am I losing the plot, or does this not look like a God given opportunity to "do what Jesus would do" in our community.

Other churches around the country are doing it.

Could God be talking to anybody about doing such a thing here in Sevenoaks?



Healthy families affirmed

Nola Leach, chief executive of CARE quotes TS Eliot, "by far the most important channel of transmission of culture, remains the family, and when family life fails to play its part, we must expect our culture to deteriorate."

The family is the fundamental building block of a healthy society. United, caring stable families make an incalculable contribution to wellbeing and welfare. If we really want to deliver social justice - equal opportunities for every child - and tackle wider social problems like child poverty, crime, school failure and drug abuse, it is only common sense to find a way to try and reverse the tide of family breakdown in the UK.

Research consistently affirms that families, underpinned by lifelong committed marriages provide the best opportunities for adults to remain together and children to thrive emotionally, physically and mentally. Research shows that, while there is a high commitment from both parents at birth, with 90% of fathers planning to help raise their child, three years later 40% of cohabiting couples have split and 50% of visiting couples have separated, whereas the break-up rate for married couples is only 10%.

Today, psychologists studying child development have come to



agree that fathers play a unique and crucial role in nurturing and guiding children's development. At play and work, mothers and fathers contribute in distinctive ways to a child's development.

Last year's UNICEF report showed that child wellbeing in Britain is very low compared to other developed nations and the felt absence of fathers was a chief consequence of this.

It is all the more concerning therefore to see government proposals currently going through parliament that a) remove the need for a father in provision of IVF treatment and b) state that, "no man is to be treated as the father of the child", thereby legally preventing such a child from ever having a father!

It is hoped that both of these provisions will be abandoned during the passage of the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Bill through parliament.

Jesus said, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the Kingdom of God belongs to such as these"

Luke 18 v 16

Extract from CARE's Winter 2007 Public Affairs Update (with permission)



Debt Recovery

Tony Cornfield

Current UK debt statistics:

Total UK personal debt at the end of October 2007 stood at **£1,391bn**. The growth rate increased to 9.7% for the previous 12 months which equates to an increase of £122bn.

Total consumer credit lending to individuals in October 2007 was **£222bn**. This has increased 5.8% in the last 12 months.

Average household debt in the UK is **£8,920** (excluding mortgages). This figure increases to **£20,741** if the average is based on the number of households who actually have some form of unsecured loan.

Britain's personal debt is increasing by **£1 million every 4 minutes**.

What if anything can or should the church do to help?

Clearly there are two aspects to consider:

- Prevention
- Recovery

One Christian organisation that provides information and resources to help people manage their finances and thereby prevent unmanageable debt, is "Credit Action" who have lots of downloadable resources from their web site: www.creditaction.org.uk

Jesus said, "I am the vine, you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit"

John 15 v 5

Recovery from unmanageable debt on the other hand needs "professional" help.

Churches across the country are working together locally to help people to recover from their debts. Both Tunbridge Wells and Tonbridge have Christian Debt Advice and Support groups where Christians work together to help individuals manage and recover from debt.

Ian Sowerby (St Nics) and I recently spent the morning at TBC Tonbridge Baptist Church and were very impressed with the comprehensive structure they have developed and that on average they work with 3 or 4 new clients every week. Their team of trained advisers come from different churches, but work under one umbrella organisation at the Baptist Church.

Could Churches Together do something similar in Sevenoaks?

Does anybody sense God's call to lead or be involved in setting one up here?

We have invited Graham Connell from TBC to come and speak about his experiences and to encourage us, so please come and see . . .

Date: Tues. 1 April

Time: 7.45 for 8.00pm

Venue: St Mary, Kippington Church Hall