Open Space

SAINT STEPHENS SOUNDWELL

KNOWING JESUS... MAKING JESUS KNOWN!

AUGUST 2026

SKY GAZING

why we should all be looking up

IMAGINE always having a simple, free, happiness tool with us that helps balance our mood, lower our stress levels and put all our problems in perspective.

WELL, we do! And all we have to do is raise our eyes to the sky!

Do you enjoy looking at and taking photographs of beautiful sunrises and sunsets?

When you were a child did you imagine shapes of things in the fluffy clouds?

I can definitely answer 'yes' to both of those questions, and according to positive psychologist Paul Conway this means that I have already subconsciously tapped into the power of *Skychology* – the practice of intentionally looking up at the sky for a few minutes a day to improve your mental health.

Research has shown that gazing at the huge expanse of the sky brings up feelings of awe. And there are other reasons why the sky can have a magical impact.

Research has found that the colour blue *(my favourite colour)* has a calming effect on our nervous system and one study found that blue increased relaxation and calming feelings compared with other colours. Looking up at the sky also helps to interrupt repetitive, negative thinking.

The term 'sky' in the Bible refers to the expanse above the earth, which includes the atmosphere and the heavens.

It appears some 700 times in Scripture, from the very first verse:

GENESIS 1:1 *"In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth",*

to one of the last – **REVELATION 21:2** *"I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God".*

The sky is a significant element in biblical literature, symbolizing God's creation and majesty. The sky is frequently mentioned in both the Old and New Testaments, serving as a backdrop for divine activity and revelation.

Saints of old found something worth seeing in the sky. They looked up a lot!

Continued overleaf>

Mission Partners with St Stephens:

- Beloved
- Bristol Churches City Fund
- Bristol City Centre Soup Run
- Bristol Schools Connection
- Christian Aid
- Community of the Sisters of the Church
- Emmaus
- Harvest for The Hungry
- One25 Project

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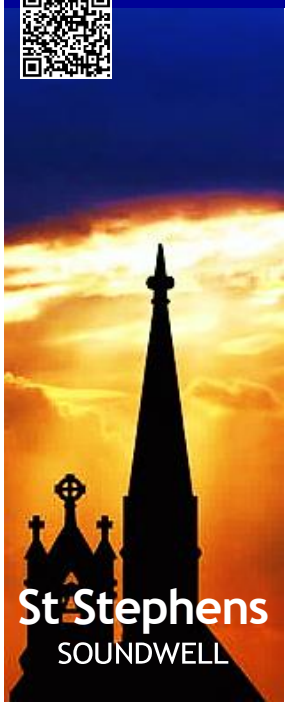
CHARITY NUMBER 1131503



SKY GAZING CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

To them the sky was wonderful!

In days gone by our ancestors would have been outside, under the sky for most of the day, searching for food, exposed to natural light, even in the winter.

Nowadays the average modern human spends about 90% of their time inside – either in buildings or vehicles.

This lack of exposure to ultraviolet light depletes our levels of the feel-good hormone serotonin, which is important for the regulation of mood. So, looking up at the sky and taking in some sunlight can help keep our body clocks synchronised and increase the mood-boosting chemicals.

Not only that, we may just feel a deeper sense of God's greatness and presence, as we look at the vast openness and splendour of the sky that he created, that we live beneath every day and so often fail to look up at and appreciate.

Throughout Scripture, the sky is a medium through which God communicates with His people. In the Old Testament, God uses the sky to provide signs and wonders.

For instance, in EXODUS 13:21 *"And the Lord went before them in a pillar of cloud to guide their way by day and in a pillar of fire to give them light by night, so that they could travel by day or night."*

In the New Testament, the sky is often associated with significant events in the life of Jesus Christ.

At his baptism in **MATTHEW 3:16** it says; *"The moment Jesus came up out of the baptismal waters, the skies opened up and he saw God's spirit – it looked like a dove – descending and landing on him."*

Similarly, at the Transfiguration, in **MATTHEW 17:5** *"While he was still speaking, a bright cloud covered them, and a voice from the cloud said, 'This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!'"*

Biblical writers were enchanted by the heavens, but sadly somehow it seems difficult for us to conjure up that enchantment in this day and age, as we get distracted by our busy lives.

In the main we are a scurrying people, a screened and head-phoned people with neither the time nor interest to consider the sky.

It's not only about looking at the sky in daylight hours but at night-time too. *'Stargazing allows us to connect with something greater than ourselves,'* says consultant psychologist Dr Elena Touroni.

If you can get into the countryside, on a clear night, away from light pollution, you will be amazed at the incredible array of stars and planets above us, far more than those visible in the city.

God paints the sky daily with a myriad of different colours, from sunrise to sunset, an ever-changing portrait, day and night with no two skies ever being the same. Each day is a new masterpiece.

God gives us the beauty of the changing skies to show us his awesome creative hand at work...

PSALM 19:1 *"The heavens declare the glory of God: the skies proclaim the work of his hands."*

God gives us the beauty of the changing skies to remind us of his love and faithfulness…

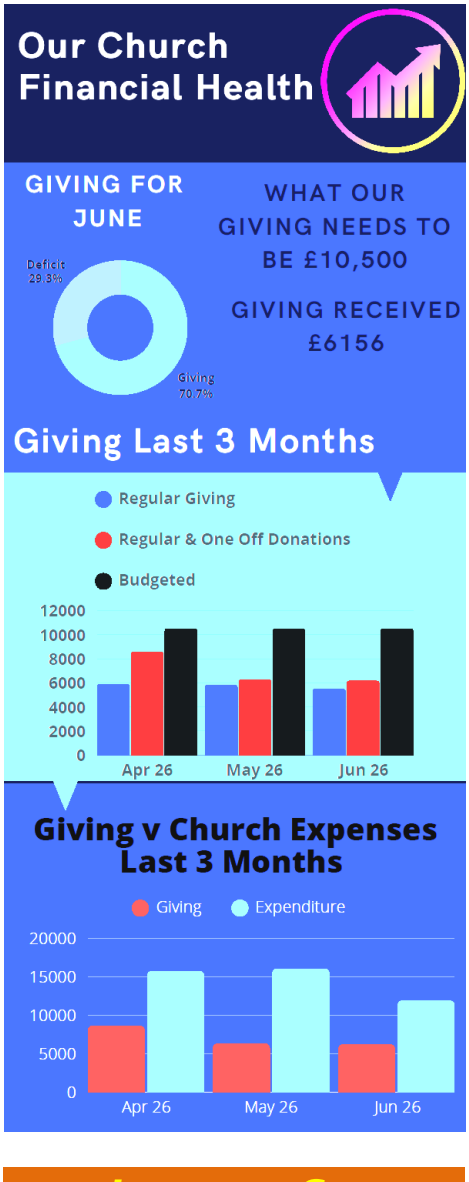
PSALM 108:3-4 *"For great is your love, higher than the heavens; your faithfulness reaches to the skies."*

Do you need a visual reminder today of God's creative power and majesty?

If so, I dare you to look up!

Julia Merrifield

Our Church Financial Health



Join us for COFFEE/ CHAT & COMPANY

11AM WEDNESDAY 5th AUGUST

at the Turnpike on Soundwell Road.

A time to be, be known, and be together.

CHANGES *during* Vacancy

VACANCY is that period of time until the next Incumbent takes up the currently vacant post of Vicar.

Because of the shortage of priests, and therefore the difficulty in finding priests to lead our Eucharistic services, some of the services we were offering have been reduced:

- **8am BCP Holy Communion** *service will be paused completely* and;
- **10am Wednesday Parish Communion** will be held twice a month; *on the 1st & 3rd Wednesdays.*

VACANCY PRAYER

LOVING Lord God, you are our faithful friend, full of care and forgiveness.

During this time of vacancy we come to you with hearts full of faith and hope, trusting in your presence with us.

We ask for your guidance on the way ahead. Give us wisdom, patience and reassurance in an anxious time, as we prepare for the next chapter in the life of this church.

We pray and trust in your grace to help us work well together, provide mutual support for each other, and to keep us united in the bond of faith and peace.

Lord, we thank you that you hear our prayer. Answer us in your loving kindness. Bring to us a person that is right for our church family, and the community of Soundwell, that will build us up in faith, as...

'We follow Jesus.'

Amen.

St Stephens PCC

Tuesday 9 to 11.30am
11 & 25 AUGUST

Please note that under 17s must be accompanied by an adult).

IN OUR CHURCH ROOM

BRING your Bible!

WEDNESDAY EVENINGS
7.15pm to 8.15pm

WE meet in the Church Room for anyone who wants to join in with simply reading the Bible! Though the scriptures in the *There is no set structure or any course work to worry about* and **everyone** is welcome!

Smile though your joints are aching

TO BE SUNG TO THE TUNE OF *Smile though your heart is breaking!*

Smile though your joints are aching,
smile when your back is breaking.
Although a tear may be ever so near
you must take all your medication...
smile through the sheer frustration--
there's nothing you can do at all
except smile!!

Greet all your friends with gladness,
don't let them feel your sadness,
rub in the special cream
when you feel you could scream,
there's no cure for the ills you're suffering,
although your knees need buffering,
you'll find that life is more worthwhile, if you just SMILE!!

Suzanne

READINGS & COLLECTS

SUNDAY 02 AUGUST
9th Sunday after Trinity

Genesis 32:22–31; Psalm 17:1–7;
Romans 9:1–5; Matthew 14:13–21

GRACIOUS FATHER, revive your Church in our day, and make her holy, strong and faithful, for your glory's sake in Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

SUNDAY 09 AUGUST
10th Sunday after Trinity

Genesis 37:1–4, 12–28; Psalm 105:1–10
Romans 10:5–15; Matthew 14:22–33

LORD OF HEAVEN and earth, as Jesus taught his disciples to be persistent in prayer, give us patience and courage never to lose hope, but always to bring our prayers before you; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

SUNDAY 16 AUGUST
11th Sunday after Trinity

Genesis 45:1–15; Psalm 133;
Romans 11:1–2a, 29–32;
Matthew 15:10–28

GOD OF GLORY, the end of our searching, help us to lay aside all that prevents us from seeking your kingdom, and to give all that we have to gain the pearl beyond all price, through our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

SUNDAY 23 AUGUST
12th Sunday after Trinity

Exodus 1:8–2:10; Psalm 124;
Romans 12:1–8; Matthew 16:13–20

GOD of constant mercy, who sent your Son to save us: remind us of your goodness, increase your grace within us, that our thankfulness may grow, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

SUNDAY 30 AUGUST
13th Sunday after Trinity

Exodus 3:1–15; Psalm 115;
Romans 12:9–end; Matthew 16:21–*end*

ALMIGHTY GOD, you search us and know us: may we rely on you in strength and rest on you in weakness, now and in all our days; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Family Fun Events

In the Church Hall

MONDAY
3rd AUGUST
10 to 11.45AM
On Safari!

MONDAY
17th AUGUST
10 to 11.45AM
On the beach!

MONDAY
24th AUGUST
2 to 3.45PM
Builders!

Fun for families with primary-aged children, *(siblings welcome).*
Attend any or all events!

Crafts, games & Bible themed activities,
snacks & drink provided
Entry FREE
but **BOOKING IS ESSENTIAL**

Sign up required on-line:
https://forms.gle/4h5iBAb6fincepkW9
or use the **QR** code

AFTER the success of our Family Fun Events earlier in the year in February and April, St Stephens Church will be hosting three exciting Family Fun Events in August.

EACH event has its own fun theme, with activity stations, games, crafts and a Bible-themed treasure hunt inspired by Bible stories. Families can explore the activities at their own pace and enjoy spending quality time together. Every event is different, so there will be something new to discover each time.

Event Dates

Monday 3 August 10–11:45am
Theme: **On Safari!**

Monday 17 August 10–11:45am
Theme: **On the Beach!**

Monday 24 August 2–3:45pm
Theme: **Builders!**

Our activities are designed with primary-aged children in mind, but younger and older siblings are very welcome too.

The events are completely free to attend but a voluntary donation towards the work of St Stephens Church will be available for anyone who wishes to do so.

Booking however is essential. Families are welcome to book for one event or all three, which helps us prepare enough activities and refreshments for everyone.

Could You Help?
To make these events a success, we are looking for volunteers from across the church family. Whether you can help set up, welcome families, run an activity station, serve refreshments, chat with parents, or tidy up afterwards, your help would be appreciated.

If you would like to volunteer or know more about what is involved, please speak to Elaine Brewster, our Community Chaplain, or email elaineb.ststephens@gmail.com.

If you have children, grandchildren, neighbours or friends who might enjoy coming along, we'd love you to invite them!

Flyers will be available at the back of church, or feel free to ask Elaine.

Thank you!

Take time, stop & stare

Dear Friends,

WHAT is this life if, full of care,
we have no time to stand and stare.

No time to stand beneath the boughs
and stare as long as sheep or cows.

No time to see, when woods we pass,
where squirrels hide their nuts in grass.

No time to see, in broad daylight,
streams full of stars, like skies at night.

No time to turn at Beauty's glance,
and watch her feet, how they can dance.

No time to wait till her mouth can
enrich that smile her eyes began.

A poor life this if, full of care,
we have no time to stand and stare.

THOSE words - from the poem 'Leisure' by *WH Davies* were written over a hundred years ago, yet, despite the massive shifts in technology and culture we still cheat ourselves of time to 'stop and stare'.

I can imagine the poet dreaming of a future time when technology might transform our living, slowing us down offering more leisure, more opportunities to reflect on what it is be a human or just to be.

Confounding that dream, technology has done the opposite. It has filled our activities even more.

We might stop and stare, but we stare at the TV, our laptops, our tablets, our phones.

Children's lives too can be all about packing in so much activity. Dashing to this group, to that club, the next sport activity, with no time offered just to be at peace, quiet, just thinking.

Followers of Jesus are encouraged to stop and stare. Jesus said:

"And why do you worry and labour?
See how the flowers of the field grow.
They do not labour or spin.
Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendour was dressed like one of these".

Take time, stop and stare.

Our lives are busy, frantic and always on the go and God didn't create us to withstand that constant tsunami of information, technology and communication.

God offered us Sabbath-time, not exclusively a Sunday – when we can contemplate and pray deeply about things.

To remember that Jesus often went off to *'a certain place'* to pray, to reflect and to make space for God and to stop and stare.

If Jesus needed to do that, then we must follow his example.

So, this August make space, take time, grasp the opportunity to just stop and stare and see and listen for what God can offer you, as well as delighting in the open spaces of our parks here in Soundwell or noticing the beautiful countryside just beyond our borders and further.

A handshake or a hug from God

WE LIVE in a world that so often keeps score.

A world that measures us by our mistakes, our failures, and the days we just couldn't quite get it right.

It's a world built on conditions. But I want to remind you of something foundational today:

God loves you just as you are.

No, it doesn't mean He doesn't want you to grow.

21st AUGUST
6.30PM in Church

It means His love isn't a prize you have to work for.

It's a gift you simply get to receive. His love isn't just a distant, spiritual idea; it's meant to be felt right here, right now, in the warmth of a handshake or the squeeze of a hug.

Think about a handshake.

It requires two open hands. Two people saying, 'I see you. We are in this together.'

That is the Gospel in a handshake, Christ reaching out with an open palm, accepting you in all your humanity, offering peace and shared fellowship.

But then, there are hugs.

A hug is where burdens are released.

A hug is a safe space to fall and be held. When life breaks you down and you feel bruised or scarred, God doesn't stand at a distance with a lecture.

He wraps His arms around you. He meets you in the middle of your mess and tells you, 'You are safe here. You are loved here'.

You see, God's love is the perfect mix of both.

It's the handshake of divine purpose, giving you the strength to stand up and walk forward.

And it's the warm, unconditional embrace that heals the deepest parts of your soul.

So wherever you are today, whatever scars or baggage you've been carrying, know this:

You don't have to clean yourself up for God. You don't have to be perfect to earn His affection.

You are fully seen, fully known, and deeply, deeply loved.

Just as you are.

Take a moment right now to just let your shoulders drop.

Breathe in His peace. And let Him embrace you.

The Friday Night Live Team!

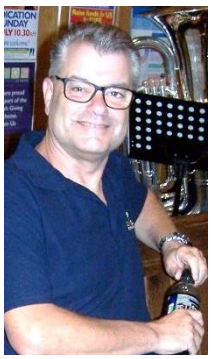
Summer Fayre
IN REVIEW!

OUR annual St Stephens Summer Fayre took place on Saturday the 11th July at 2pm, and what a glorious event it turned out to be!

Thanks go to everyone who participated in the event in whatever way and it couldn't be done without the combined help of all involved.

The Fayre raised £900+ for Church funds.

Amazing display of raffle prizes – and only £1 per strip. What did you win?



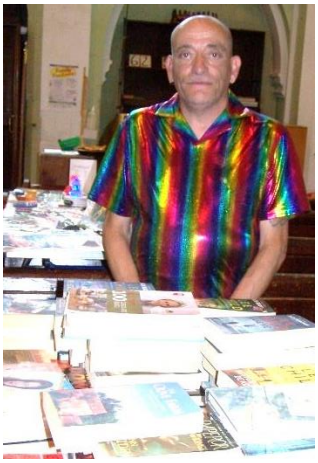
And the band played on – music to shop by…

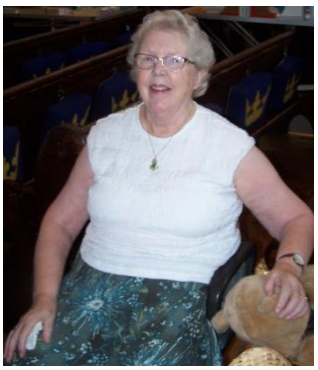
Amazing display of vegetables & fruit

Higher than an 8 you say? Yes but – no but – lower

All Julia's own creation

Children hard at work in the colouring section, keeping within the lines.





Full house in the Church Hall – enjoying the cool of the air-con on the hot afternoon

Puppet joy on the Bubble Church stand

Smiles galore, no charge

Lisa's last sermon

A VIDEO recording is available to view on line, either on the Church website www.saintstephensoundwell.org or on YouTube direct: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MNYsGrzggAg

Confirmation

Jayne Durnell and **Keith Winter** were Confirmed on Sunday 21st June and are pictured here with Rt Rev Neil Warwick, Bishop of Swindon, and Acting Bishop of Bristol after the Service held at Christ the King, Bradley Stoke.

AUGUST CYCLE OF PRAYER *BEGINNING SUNDAY OF EACH WEEK*

02	Director of Music: Lin Cooper	Elaine and Andrew Brewster Mary Britton, Bill and Jan Brookshaw Thomas Brown	Nympsfield Peartree Lane Pembroke Road
09	Organist: Tim Parker	Rachel Bush, Lara Chilcott Emma, Ian, Riley & Morgan Clarke Sue Clements and David Eldred	Penny Lane Phoenix Grove Pinewood
16	Church Choir	Jackie Clench, Sandra Conway Maggie Cook, Sandy and Lin Cooper Teresa, Robert, Benjy & Jacob Cooper	Pool Road Portland Court Portland Place
23	Churchwarden: Gill Mayo & Paul Sanderson	Marlene Crew, Ruth Crosby Iris Davis, Ros Davis Jean Denley, Margaret Dodge	Portland Street Pound Road Prospect Crescent
30	Co-Church Wardens: Tim & Julia	Dawn Duffin, Jayne and Ian Durnell Bob and Nancy Emery, Pamela Faulkner Ken Fox, Mary Fox-Starr	Randall Close Riviera Crescent Rodway View

SUNDAYS: 10.30am **Community Worship Service** weekly.
Youth Church in the Church Hall 10.30am weekly.

Bubble Church 9.15am 2nd Sunday of the month, ie: 9th August

Prayer Ministry is offered after the 10.30am Service on the 1st and 3rd Sundays *or at any other time by request, so do please ask as necessary.*

WEDNESDAYS: 10am **Service of Holy Communion** on the 1st and 3rd Wednesday of each month, ie: August 5th &19th.

NB: **Bible Chat** is paused during August.

AUGUST DIARY (beware of summer holiday shutdowns!)

03 Monday	10~11.45am	**FAMILY FUN MORNING** *in the Church Hall*
04 Tuesday	1.30pm	**Knit & Natter** *in the Church Room (then weekly)*
05 Wednesday	11am	**Coffee/Chat/Company** *at the Turnpike Pub*
	7.15pm	**BRING YOUR BIBLE** *in the Church Room*
10 Monday	10.15am	**Retreat Memory Café** *in the Church Hall* for Dementia sufferers and their carers
11 Tuesday	9~11.30am	**WELCOME SPACE** *in the Church Room*
12 Wednesday	7.15pm	**BRING YOUR BIBLE** *in the Church Room*
17 Monday	10~11.45am	**FAMILY FUN MORNING** *in the Church Hall*
19 Wednesday	7.15pm	**BRING YOUR BIBLE** *in the Church Room*
21 Friday	6.30pm	**FRIDAY NIGHT LIVE** *in Church*
24 Monday	10.15am	**Retreat Memory Café** *in the Church Hall* for Dementia sufferers and their carers
	2~3.45pm	**FAMILY FUN AFTERNOON** *in the Church Hall*
25 Tuesday	9~11.30am	**WELCOME SPACE** *in the Church Room*
26 Wednesday	7.15pm	**BRING YOUR BIBLE** *in the Church Room*

SEPTEMBER DIARY

01 Tuesday	1.30pm	**Knit & Natter** *in the Church Room (then weekly)*
02 Wednesday	11am	**Coffee/Chat/Company** *at the Turnpike Pub*
	7.15pm	**BRING YOUR BIBLE** *in the Church Room*
03 Thursday	10am	See & Know Toddler's Group *in the Church Hall (then weekly)*
	1.30pm	**Ladies Group** *in the Church Hall* (then fortnightly)
08 Tuesday	9~11.30am	**WELCOME SPACE** *in the Church Room*
09 Wednesday	2pm	**BIBLE CHAT resumes** *in the Church Room*
	7.15pm	**BRING YOUR BIBLE** *in the Church Room*
10 Thursday	1.30pm	**Men's Group** *in the Church Room* (then fortnightly)

FROM THE REGISTERS

Funerals:

• JULY 21: **Cyril David John (Dave) Parker** (91).
The celebration of Dave's life was held at St Stephens Church, Soundwell.
Please hold Dave's wife Jan, son Tim and granddaughters Olivia and Sophie, as well as all Dave's wider family and many friends in your prayers.

• JULY 24: **Michelle Julie Gabriella Clements** (59). The celebration of Michelle's life was held at St Stephens Church, Soundwell.
Please hold Michelle's son Josh, with partner Mike, and Mum Charmaine and all the wider family and friends in your prayers.

See the join up advert on page 7

SAINT STEPHENS SOUNDWELL

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Church Warden
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• **Gill Mayo**
Church Warden
Telephone 0117 956 9796

• **Tim Parker**
Co Church Warden
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• **Julia Merrifield**
Co Church Warden
Telephone 07 *931 240 933*

• **Elaine Brewster**
Community Chaplain
Telephone 07 902 095915

• **Jenny Bishop**
Pastoral Co-ordinator
Telephone 0117 9575729

• **Jan Brookshaw**
Co Pastoral Co-ordinator
Telephone 07 8540 41046

• Revd **Sandy Cooper**
Associate Minister, 1 Deerhurst Soundwell, Bristol BS15 1XH
Telephone 0117 967 2621

• **Lorraine Sanderson** *Treasurer*
Telephone 07 858 017 102

• **Lin Cooper** *Director of Music*
Telephone 0117 967 2621