

Bread of Life

STROOD



Project of the year 2021

Introducing a clear vision...

Once in a while, God provides an opportunity that is both incredibly exciting and challenging. Bread of Life, Strood, is one such example...

In March 2019, a shop with accommodation above became the responsibility of SEBA. Within a short time, a clear vision emerged to transform it into a coffee shop – bakery – church, a place in which to serve the local community and establish a new worshipping community.

The premises had originally been gifted to Strood Evangelical Church in the early 1950s. By the beginning of 2019, the remaining congregation had dwindled to such an extent that the difficult decision was taken to stop meeting.

It made no sense to attempt to restart a traditional model of church in the place, yet the location in a thriving parade of shops at the heart of a sprawling, mixed community, shouted that this was ideally situated for mission.

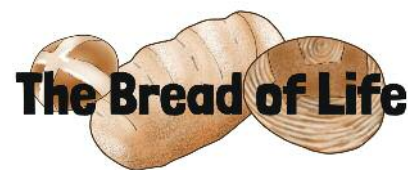
...and a pioneering project

During the initial lockdown, on April 1st, 2020, SEBA took the bold step of appointing Rev John Western, an experienced minister and trustee of BMS World Mission, to head up the project.

Phase 1 involves transforming the ground floor into a welcoming coffee shop and bakery and renovating the flat above to become an integral manse. Inevitably this has experienced some delays. Yet God has been faithful. Some essential preparatory tasks have been completed including removal of asbestos, gaining planning permission and setting up a trading subsidiary of SEBA through which the business can operate. It has also been a fruitful time of networking and building relationships.

Phase 2 will see the coffee shop and bakery commence trading, hopefully in summer 2021. The purpose is to see people who might be unlikely to walk into a traditional church, find faith in Jesus and grow in discipleship. Initially the plan is to operate as a coffee shop 4 days a week and a micro-bakery 1 day a week.

It is envisaged that various activities will take place within the coffee shop. Many of these will depend on who walks through the door and their needs and desires. John has written a breadmaking course entitled "the Bread of Life Course", which he uses to open up conversations about faith in Jesus, the Bread of Life. These are sure to feature.



*The parade of shops
in Darnley Road, Strood*



Rev. John Western



The main room - current state

I am the Bread of Life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.

a means of outreach...

Bread of life is designed to be an example of integral mission. Trading will cover the costs of John's stipend, but baking is not intended to be a "tent-making" activity to provide sufficient funds for John to do church in his spare time. It will be the means of outreach. The project will be evangelistic, but is not intended to produce a flow of people to traditional congregations, but rather to become a congregation in its own right.

God's provision and leading...

Since April 2020, John has served as interim minister of the nearest SEBA church to the premises – Strood Gospel Mission Church. During this time, another SEBA church, Borstal Baptist Church, are providing accommodation for John and his wife, Lorraine, until they can move to the flat.

Grants have been obtained, contributing £50k to the significant building costs. A further £30-50k is still required for the fitting out of the bakery and coffee shop.

John has been busy serving other SEBA churches, for example, providing a sheaf loaf for the harvest celebration of Minster Road BC and running an online version of the Bread of Life course for West Malling BC.

How can our church get involved?

1. John will be available to speak about the Bread of Life in your services, whether online or in the building. He will also have some capacity to lead online Bread of Life courses, which may be a positive boost as well as a means of introducing faith to folks during lockdown.

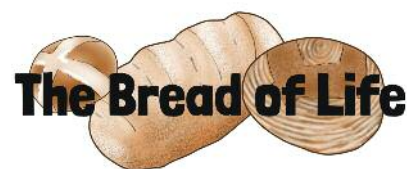
2. John is sending out regular email updates with the latest news and prayer requests. He will be very pleased to add individuals or your church's prayer co-ordinator to the list.

3. If your congregation is local to Strood, members may be interested to give, say, half a day a week, to volunteer in the coffee shop, waiting on table and chatting to customers.

To respond in any of ways 1 to 3 -

please email John at: BreadOfLife@seba-baptist.org.uk

4. We realise that the budgets of many individuals and churches have been affected by the Coronavirus pandemic, but if you are inspired by this kingdom work and able to give financially that would be a real blessing. Donations should be made to SEBA, clearly indicating they are for Bread of Life / Project of the Year. Whether made by cheque or bank transfer, please advise Steph Tidy to ensure it is distinguished from any regular giving and allocated to the project - admin@seba-baptist.org.uk



Strood Gospel Mission Church



Harvest loaf arriving on Sheppey



Online Bread of Life Course



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