

Stephen Coe Sabbatical May – July 2009

My study project was: *to reflect on the theological and practical aspects of advancing mission in the multi-cultural city setting from the base of the local church.* Along with this I aimed to set aside personal rest time and also to visit friends and family around the country. In May I visited, with my wife, three churches in USA – two in Manhattan, NY and one in New Jersey. In June I visited churches in Lancaster, London, Edinburgh, Glasgow and the Scottish Highlands. In addition to rest time in France and Scotland, I spent a week in study retreat at St Deiniols Library, Wales and a week participating in Keswick Conference. I have found the time extremely beneficial. The privilege of having additional time away from normal duties has enabled me to have time and space to reflect on myself and ministry. Of particular help in this was a commitment I made to keep a daily journal – which ran to 100 pages – and to send to my church by email regular ‘sabbatical jottings’. This helped me when I returned in that, in giving my report to the church, a number had already absorbed some of the issues I had been reflecting on. After participating in a parish mission in the West Country (straight after my sabbatical) I completed a 4000 word dissertation on the study theme. Four key points from this have emerged for me to hold onto:

- gospel message needs to be at the heart of church life and its relevance preached into the culture of the community
- keep church life simple – no need for leaders to ‘perform’ but it is each member’s responsibility to worship
- outreach can only happen through relationships with unbelievers – this takes focus and time
- I need to beware of overwork and trust God with limits of energy and resources.