

What is Stapleford Baptist Church?

In law, Stapleford Baptist Church (SBC) is a charity. It has about 60 members. I'm one of those. Several of the people who've been helping today are members. Franco & Li-Mee have applied to become members. But anyone can come to the meetings of SBC – it's not a closed organisation. You are here today and you're very welcome. But its *members* are the people who make the major decisions. Its *members* are the people who provide almost all of the money to pay the employees, to pay for electricity and gas, and to maintain the buildings. The church doesn't receive money from government or any external organisation.

SBC has existed for a long time. The church – the group of people – was established about 150 years ago. The main building was constructed in 1877 and 1878 at a cost of £1146,22.5p! The people who started the church were quite poor, so they couldn't afford good quality building materials – which is a problem for today's members who have to maintain the building.

Free education was not available in England until 1891. The government required towns to provide schools in 1870, but they weren't usually free. So, poor people often couldn't afford to send their children to school. Some families needed to send their children to work, not to school, to get some money. So in the 1870s and 1880s there was a lot of political disturbance – the government said “here are the schools and you should send your children to them”, but, until 1891, many poor people couldn't afford to do that ... they saw the children from richer families getting educated, getting better jobs, while their own children got no help. And that's a major reason for this part of the building, where you are now sitting. It was constructed 6 years after the front building in 1883-4 to provide space for a Sunday School. On Sundays, poor children didn't need to go to work so, as well as religious education, they could get some basic education in reading, writing and arithmetic.

If you look in the passage-way, just outside that door, you can see some bricks from the original wall with the names of sponsors of this Sunday School building. If a person contributed £1, then they would have a brick placed in the wall with their name on.

Thankfully, in 2022 we don't have the same problems with children's' education. But the church, as an organisation, still tries to help people with the needs of 2022. For example, we collect food that we give to the West Nottingham Food Bank – which makes food parcels for families who are in a financial crisis and can't afford food. We help with “Baby Basics” which makes up packs for new mothers who are alone – those mothers who don't have anyone to help them. The pack will have some baby clothes, a basket for the baby to sleep in, some baby-care products and something for the mum, too.

And let's not forget Conversation Club which we started about 8 months ago to help some of you with your English. At least, that's our aim and I hope you are improving your English.

And this Monday we just started to offer a Warm Space – for many people it will be difficult to find enough money to heat their homes this winter. So we are opening the building every Monday over the winter so that anyone who is cold can come in and stay warm. Other churches in Stapleford are doing the same on other days each week.

Why did the members of 150 years ago behave like this? Why do today's members continue to behave generously like this? – it's not cheap to be generous! You might think that, because we believe in God, we must be generous so that God will accept us. But if you think that then you have things the wrong way round! If you come to Conversation Club you'll know that we study an English idiom each week – so here's another one – “Don't put the cart before the horse” – of course, horses pull carts, they don't push carts! So, if you think that Christians are generous because they are trying to get God to look after them, then you're putting the cart before the horse! No! Christians in 1870 and 1880 and Christians in 2022 are generous with their time and money because they have *already received* God's help and his care. And they've already received a promise from him of joy and peace. To be generous is one of the ways Christians say “thank you” to God for all *his* generosity.

The members of SBC – and millions of other Christians – have discovered that God is not a remote idea. He's not a distant figure who must be woken up by gifts or actions at certain times, or in certain places, or at certain times. Let me read you a few words written by a Christian named Paul almost 2000 years ago. His explanation is better than any I could give you. This is what he said:

“God made the world and everything in it. He is the Lord of the sky and the earth. He does not live in houses that people make with their hands. Men and women cannot worship him by things they make with their hands because *he does not need anything*. He is the one who *gives* life and breath and everything else to all people. He did this so we would look for him. He wanted us to reach out and find him. But he is not far from each one of us” [Acts 17:24-7].

The Christians here at SBC have reached out and found him. And they've discovered his generosity and love in lots of ways. And we love to pass on that generosity and love. Now, our generosity is tiny. It's a very poor copy of God's. But we hope that it's enough to encourage you to reach out and find God yourself if you haven't already done that. Or if you have reached out and found God, then we hope it will encourage you to join us at SBC and help us to better show God's generosity in Stapleford and the surrounding areas.

If you don't already do so, come along on a Sunday morning with your children. We'd love to see you. Maybe your kids and teenagers would like to attend our Friday evening club called “Illuminate”. And do plan to attend the Cantonese language Christmas Special in the evening of December 18th – with Christmas songs in Cantonese!