

I confessed faith on Ghanaian trip

OF all the places where Steve McDermott could stand up and share his new-found faith, it happened to be a church in Ghana.

The 20-year-old was part of the Project G team that visited the Diocese of Ho last summer to help decorate a classroom for children with special needs.

As part of their visit, he was asked to speak about his faith to worshippers at a Sunday morning service. It was the first time he had publicly declared he was a Christian.

Yet if you had asked him just a few months beforehand, he would have said the Church was a way of controlling people and that Jesus was a narcissist. It was his experience at St Cuthbert's Church, Copnor, that changed his mind.

"I don't think I would have the faith that I have now without the people at St Cuthbert's," he said. "A church is only as good as its people, and these people made me feel really welcome and answered all my questions."

Steve had been baptised in St Michael's, Paulsgrove, but was the last in his family to be baptised. His great-nan, who was a regular churchgoer, died shortly afterwards and his family opted out of baptisms from then on.

As a teenager, he started going out with Lauren Brushwood, whose family go to St Cuthbert's Church. After about eight months of their relationship, she persuaded him to try a church service.

"I didn't really see the point," he said. "But I came to a Christmas service and it wasn't what I expected. It was more upbeat than I thought it would be and very welcoming."

He kept coming and in February 2016 he experienced something of God's healing. He had recently had an operation on his kidneys and was experiencing pain after drinking liquids. He decided to pray about it himself during a church service.

"No one else knew what I was praying, although I've told them since," he said. "I prayed and felt a burning sensation around my



Steve McDermott explains his faith in a Ghanaian church

kidney. After that, I didn't feel any pain and it has been OK ever since. Some people might think it was my body healing itself, but I thought it was God."

Meanwhile, Lauren had joined a group of young people from churches around Portsmouth who were planning and fundraising for a trip to Ghana that summer, as part of our diocese's Inter-Diocesan West Africa Link (IDWAL).

Steve was talked into coming to one of their meetings and then found himself pictured in the *Pompey Chimes* alongside the Bishop of Ho, the Rt Rev Matthias Mededues-Badohu, as part of the team. He still wasn't convinced about Christianity, but joined a Lent group and then a Christianity Explored group, at which he was able to ask difficult questions.

"I asked our vicar, David Power, about the story of Adam and Eve, because I thought it was a load of twaddle," he said. "I remember I also said I thought Jesus was a narcissist. David told me he used to love my questions because they made him laugh. But they did always treat them seriously and try to answer them. David helped me a lot."

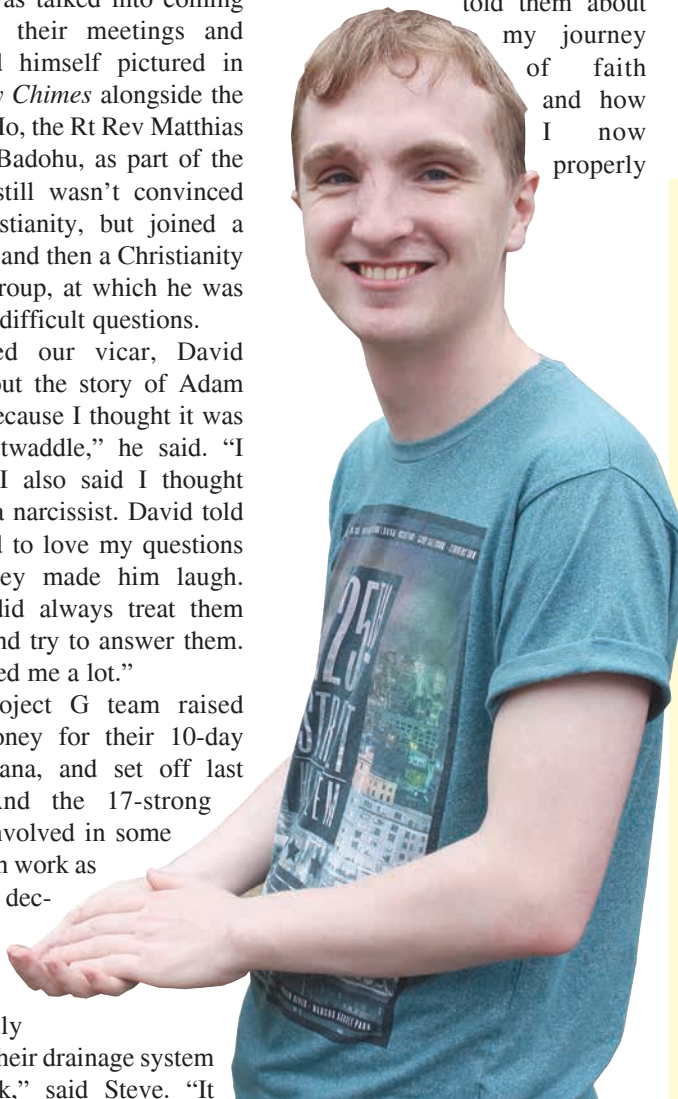
The Project G team raised enough money for their 10-day trip to Ghana, and set off last August. And the 17-strong team got involved in some construction work as well as the decorating.

"I remember being really angry that their drainage system didn't work," said Steve. "It

kept collapsing. We worked really hard, mixing concrete and laying it out so that we could get the water flowing. That was an overwhelmingly powerful experience because I'd managed to help them practically.

"The on the Sunday, one of the leaders, Mike Duff, told me at 7am that I would be saying something in the 8am service about my faith. I got up in front of 100 people and

told them about my journey of faith and how I now properly



my faith

Steve McDermott signed up for a trip to Ghana before he was completely convinced about Christianity. But it was the sense of community in his church that helped him make up his mind

believed. I said I'd felt so much joy by being there and everyone clapped. It was the best thing I'd ever experienced.

"The whole trip was an amazing experience, because I'd never been to Africa before, it was only the third time I'd flown, and it was incredible to see people who have so little being so happy."

Back in the UK, he proposed to Lauren in October, and they plan to get married in September 2018 at St Cuthbert's. He was also confirmed by Bishop Christopher, despite some reservations.

"I wasn't sure I wanted to get confirmed as we were moving house, and I wanted to concentrate on that," he said. "But I went to a couple of the preparation groups and decided to. My whole family were there, even though my mum and dad say church isn't really their thing.

"I remember that as the bishop put the oil on my head and laid his

hands on me, I burst into tears. It was an overwhelming sensation. I looked back and my grandmother was in tears. My grandad said church wasn't for him, but he could see something powerful in it for me."

Steve is now on the rota to do Bible readings in church, and is part of a midweek discussion group. He also hopes to visit Ghana again with Lauren at some point, and meets up regularly with others from the Project G team.

He works for a mobile phone company and his friends at work have also noticed a difference in how he treats customers and work colleagues.

"I have been to other churches, and for me, the biggest thing about St Cuthbert's is how inclusive and welcoming they have been," he said. "I would say to anyone that being part of a good church community is the most important thing."



Emily Burt (left) and Hollie Simmons

Inspired to help in Uganda

ANOTHER member of the Project G team that visited Ghana last summer is planning to return to Africa this August.

Hollie Simmons, 16, will be working with those living in the slums around Kampala in Uganda, with the charity Joy for Children.

She's heading out there with her friend Emily Burt

from August 11-23.

She said: "I was inspired by the Diocese of Portsmouth trip to Ghana to go even deeper into the needs and problems that people face in everyday normal life."

She has already raised £2,000 of the £1,400 she needs, and will be doing a sponsored swim this month after a jumble sale in May.