

Calvary Newsletter New Year 2015



Old and new mix in the London Road area of Brighton

Past, Present and Future

We have recently completed purchase of the freehold of the building. The full cost, including professional fees, totalling c. £165,000 has been raised by personal giving. The freehold of the building is now held on our behalf by the Fellowship of Evangelical Churches (FIEC) of which we are a member. These brief sentences summarise a massive undertaking with a complex history. This is an important and right moment for us to look back, note what has happened in our time and consider what this might mean for the future.

Looking back

The people of Israel were constantly encouraged (and warned) by God to be careful to remember their past. It's easy to lose that memory and we'll be all the poorer if we do. If we forget our past our view of God's greatness and provision will be diminished and our trust in this same God for our present and future will be degraded. Also, our past shows up our weakness and that is always a helpful and salutary reminder because we see God's mercy and kindness and longsuffering towards us in a brighter light. There has been uncertainty over ownership of the building for about sixty years, the source of much debate, correspondence and prayer—without a satisfactory resolution. Uncertainty is never easy to live with and this has definitely not been a comfortable experience with huge potential for misunderstanding and 'falling out'. Paul warns the Corinthian Christians about taking disputed matters in church life to secular courts (1 Corinthians 6:1-6) and this issue had the potential of heading in that direction. But by God's grace and careful Christian behaviour on the part of the church officers and the Railway Mission it didn't go down that path. Thank God! A better way was forged and a resolution found which blesses the Railway Mission, Calvary Church, the Kingdom of God and the honour of God's Name. The LORD has truly helped all of us.

Pausing to consider

Over the last 18 months an enormous sum of money has been raised to fully cover all the costs. We are a small number—current membership of 29 with fewer than ten of these in paid secular employment. There are big demands on young families, ongoing commitments to support a full time elder and a gospel worker, as well as looking after a building which needs regular loving care. Add to that a serious commitment to support mission work here and overseas. But we've been able to face this challenge cheerfully, expectantly, sacrificially and with constant evidence that the Lord is in the business of supplying the needs of his people. (See Phil. 4:14-19). A lovely example of God's timely supply was an opportunity that arose late in 2013 for us to apply for funds that had become available due to the sale of a church building in Eastbourne. The result was that we received a grant £22,000 in February to set against the cost of continuing to employ Ben Alltimes as a Gospel Worker for a further year.

We have been blessed and encouraged by the historical passages in the Bible—both Old and New Testaments—telling how God's people have learned how to give as God wants them to; willingly, wholeheartedly, repeatedly. We have learned that there is a 'grace of giving' which every church, and everyone in every church, can aspire to (2 Corinthians 8:7). I can also report how we have been blessed by generous giving from Christians who used to be part of Calvary Church but are now scattered all over the world. It's been very precious to see how God has laid it on the hearts of these people to remember us and to give as God has directed them. This is all the more impressive when we consider that some of these friends left the area twenty or thirty years ago, but they still remember and pray for us. A seed was sown way, way back which continues to bear fruit in disciplined lives.

Regeneration in London Road

Looking forward—with expectancy

There are a number of good reasons why we are not only breathing a sigh of relief that the difficulties of past years have been brought to a resolution (although that is no small thing when so much time and energy has been taken up by this). For instance we have been given reassurance that this is the geographical place where God wants us to be and shine for him. And what a time this is with the growing population and activity of the London Road area. We can focus more on the work of getting the good news of Jesus Christ out into the neighbourhood in which God has placed us, including allocating funds to people ministry rather than building purchase. This is releasing the coming generations from a burden and concern. They will have their own challenges but we've done well and right to have relieved them of this one. The Railway Mission has been given substantial funds which can be employed to pay the salaries of the chaplains who work as Christian men and women in a multi-cultural, secular industry. It is surely no accident that in parallel with the resolution of this matter fresh opportunities for work and witness have arisen for the Railway Mission.

The story of what has happened is a testimony, not just to us and other Christians, but to the world. Fine words are one thing but hard cash speaks a language that people can understand. About a year ago I watched with interest as a Brighton neighbourhood came together to try to raise about £150,000 to buy a building smaller than ours to be a community centre for the area. In the end a purchase was achieved via loans made by a number of people buying into a complex business plan. They did well to do what they did. But that was a secular venture. The difference here is that we have not just looked around for human help but called to the God of heaven and earth (whose plans are marvellous and cannot be thwarted) and we have been privileged to be involved in the outworking of just a tiny part of these plans.

Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honour and glory for ever and ever, Amen (1 Tim 1:17)

Chris Fry



Calvary folk at the Dalesdown church week-end away in April 2014

Jeremiah 29:7 "seek the peace-and-prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile"

These words were spoken to the Jewish exiles who found themselves in Babylon, the land of their opponents. Calvary Church building is situated on the corner of one of the busiest and most congested junctions in Brighton. To the north is a residential area, to the south is a high street called "London Road". Back in 2008 London Road had a reputation of being seedy, inhabited by street drinkers and generally in economic and social decline. Back in the days when our very existence as a church was in doubt, due to the likelihood of the building being sold, we asked the Lord whether he really wanted us to be here. If God did want us here, then what could be his purpose—a purpose that could not be fulfilled by another church, in another place? We exercised our thoughts and prayers on that matter, and when very local opportunities cropped up we thought we should take the risk and get involved.

What has happened to London Road over the last 6 years? Answer: London Road has been blessed with remarkable regeneration. There have been many factors in this—one of the main ones being the purchase of the large 6 storey Co-op department store to turn into state-of-the-art student accommodation. The drug and alcohol services have been relocated. One of the local off-licences which seemed to be a honeypot for street drinkers had its licence challenged by community activists. The Government Portas scheme gave a grant of £83,000. Calvary Church was involved in all of these activities in one way or another. And there is one other factor which no one else saw. We made all of these issues matters of prayer! New businesses have come and been very successful. A new community network has sprung up. Issues have been identified, prayed about, and action has been taken in partnership with all the public, private and political players. God has been good to London Road. But we are still praying for spiritual regeneration.

Philip Wells



New student accommodation under construction, in London Road

What is Community Chaplaincy?

Shortly after I took up the role of gospel worker at Calvary Church it was suggested that I used the term 'community chaplain' when reaching out to people in our local area. I thought that this was a good idea and began using this title when introducing myself to our non-Christian friends and neighbours. But what exactly does this term mean and why do we use it? I'll attempt to briefly answer these questions in the hope that it will give you a clearer understanding of what I am trying to achieve in my ministry.

Calvary Church is and has always been a local church at the heart of its community. From its formation amongst the maze of terraced streets which once housed the workers of the Brighton Railway Works to its present day position at the end of a rapidly regenerating London Road, the church has sought to be a faithful witness to the gospel of Jesus Christ. We give thanks for those faithful men and women that have preceded us and now pray that we might be diligent in proclaiming that same good news in what is now a very different city and community.

So why do we use the term 'Community Chaplain'? Why not 'Evangelist' or 'Gospel Worker'? Well, it's partly because the concept of community is something that tends to resonate well with people today, something which has positive connotations. There also remains a familiarity with the term 'chaplain' which can work in our favour. People may have come across hospital or university chaplains and they are seen as friendly figures who are on hand to help those who are in need and provide a listening ear. Of course as evangelical Christians we want to do far more than that; we want to lead people to Christ, but by using a term which has more positive connotations than 'evangelist' and which means more to most people than 'gospel worker' we hope to build bridges and win the trust of others. The fact that I call myself a Community Chaplain is not meant to conceal the fact that I am actually an evangelist. I make no bones about the fact that my desire is to promote the Christian faith and win disciples for the Lord, but I aim to do it in a wise and sensitive manner. Many of you will be familiar with the Street Pastors movement which has won plaudits and admirers across the country, providing a practical service to communities. But the primary purpose is not evangelistic. Whilst I understand that there can be insensitive and unhelpful ways of trying to preach the gospel, and that there is something to be said for a 'friendship evangelism' approach, I believe that it's important that we don't lose our 'gospel edge'.

As a community chaplain, I try to strike the right balance between using my title as a non-threatening way

to win the trust of people and being absolutely honest about my intention of promoting the Christian faith. An evangelist might be unwelcome at a residential care home but a community chaplain might not be. However, as a chaplain I am always seeking opportunities to speak about the gospel and if anyone asked me I would be absolutely honest about my desire to win converts. So far I have been able to strike this balance quite effectively and the community chaplain label has opened up some doors which might otherwise have been closed to me.

So what approach do we take to reach our community with the gospel? Well apart from our regular book tables in London Road and our leaflet distribution, we are seeking to build relationships with as many people in the community as possible. Philip is doing a great job in his role as chairman of the London Road Action Team and we should pray regularly for him and for his many contacts in the area. I am hoping that I will become a well-known figure amongst the traders and residents and that I will have many opportunities to share the gospel. It is also important that local people are made aware that Calvary Church engages with 'real life'; that it is genuinely concerned about the wellbeing of its neighbourhood, both spiritual and otherwise. Please pray that we'll be wise and sensitive and that we'll use every opportunity that presents itself to reach as many people as possible for Christ.

Let's face it. It's highly unlikely that most people will come to us to hear the gospel so we must go to the places where they are. In the Parable of the Great Banquet Jesus tells how the master commanded his servant, "Go out to the roads and country lanes and make them come in, so that my house will be full." Perhaps our Lord is saying a similar thing to us today: "Go into the backstreets, the businesses and homes of Brighton and make them come in" The task is not an easy one and we often make mistakes and miss opportunities. We have to acknowledge that we are in it for the long haul and that there are no formulas to follow which will bring quick results. In all this we trust that God will use us to make known the Name of the Lord Jesus and to win precious souls for His Kingdom. What a joy and privilege to labour in God's harvest field!

Do feel free to ask me about any aspects of my work and ministry. I'd love to talk to you.

Ben Alltimes

On the Record

Word Ministry

During 2014 we undertook some doctrine-focused preaching series. Philip Wells addressed basic Christian doctrine (called 'The Main Points' if you want to follow it up on the website). He also led us through some of the 'Difficult Things Jesus Said' and a series on the important topics of marriage and divorce. I gave two sermons on the doctrine of Scripture and a series on 'Faith Alone, Grace Alone'. The latter was followed up by a historical discussion from Philip. Chris Fry continued his more practical topic-based teaching on a variety of issues. A highlight was two sermons particularly relevant in this year of 'buying the building'. One was entitled 'Who do you think you are?' and covered our self-image as individual Christians and as a church. The second had the self-explanatory title 'God's beautiful gift of giving'!

We have not neglected the detailed exposition of Scripture. Philip completed his major series on Romans, and then led us into Mark's Gospel. I have looked at Proverbs and the Letters of John. A new addition to our home team is Aaron Reeves: in October he led us on the letters to the churches in Revelation, and he also led our end of year meditation on 'Looking Back and Pressing Forward'.

We are grateful to Christ Church Haywards Heath: three of their preaching team gave us sermons on meals in Luke's Gospel. The Young Adults group has a regular weekday Bible Study and small group teaching of Scripture to some of our womenfolk is undertaken by Maria Wells and Brenda Ellacott. Thanks also to all the children's Sunday Club teachers led by Rachel Rayfield

Missionary and Outreach

In January we welcomed James and Lori Clarke, telling us of their work in Albania. In April, Principal Mano from Baldaeus Theological College, Sri Lanka, brought us up to speed with the work there, and Calvary's decades old link with the Vinukonda Medical and Missionary Fellowship in India was reinvigorated by a visit from Pastor Kumar and his wife.

In preparation for our own Easter outreach as part of Passion for Life 2014, Jonathan Carswell introduced the 'Word One to One' Bible study booklets. Led by Ben Alltimes, we undertook a week of street outreach in April and again in August. We held two open Men's breakfasts. In March we had a guest speaker from local opticians Specky Wren, and in May, at the height of the Ukraine crisis, Ben Alltimes gave us an insight into the issues dividing that land. In December we went out carol singing and our two Carol Services on 21st December

Special Events

Our annual church weekend away took place from 4th-6th April. David Sprouse from Cuckfield was the speaker. By all accounts it was a very beneficial time. Other notable events included a Platoon men's camp in May (speaker Steven Nowak) and a Charity Musical Evening in June in support of Brighton Housing Trust. In June we held a 'Vision morning' looking beyond the building purchase, and in September our usual week of prayer. There was also a prayer morning for Calvary parents in November. Gift Days for the building purchase were held in April and September, and in June the Emily Kinross Memorial Fund Gift Day which funds Scriptures for children and young people. In March, David Blower gave a thought provoking BeThinking talk on the opposition between the church and the world under the title 'Kingdom versus Empire'. He has written a book with the same title. Attendance of non-Calvary people was disappointing and we are re-thinking BeThinking.

Calvary International Cafe and Caterpillars

Our Saturday evening club for international students continues to thrive with visitors from several language schools. Various entertainments are organised and they are always great fun. The Caterpillars parent-and-toddler group also continues with good numbers.

Births, Weddings and Funerals

Baby Isaac was born to the Rayfields in December. Zac and Darlene were married at Calvary in May: our first in-house wedding for many years. In July, Katharine and Samuel were married at Bishop Hannington Church (for reasons of space).

Stalwart former member Joan Thomas (wife of former elder Rod) died in North Wales in March. A transcript of the funeral shows her many contributions: see <http://freepdfhosting.com/183e0c634b.pdf> It is well worth reading, but too long to put in this Newsletter: ask us if you need a printed copy. In November, Mike Benwell died. We held a well-attended Funeral Service and Thanksgiving. We also note the passing of Jenny Long. In recent years she worshipped at Holland Road Baptist Church, but she is remembered fondly as a Calvary Sunday School teacher by many (now grown up) whose Christian foundations included Jenny's faithful ministry.

Maintenance

The War on Damp continues with breathable plaster applied to trouble spots in the main hall.

A New Year

We thank all our readers for fellowship in the gospel and look forward to it continuing in 2015.

Steve Ellacott